

# Socialist Worker

€1.00/£0.70p

NO 234 | JANUARY 3RD-15TH, 2005

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## IRAQ – THE ELECTION SMOKESCREEN

Socialist Worker special report



Eye witness report from Falluja & preview of the Iraqi Elections  
Pages 3 & 6



## POSTAL WORKERS FIGHT TO SAVE AN POST

“There is no way they will get this through”

THIS IS how to do it. A national strike and an 8,000 strong march to Dail Eireann.

The action by postal workers on the 8th of December sent shock waves through the political establishment in Ireland. Communications Minister, Noel Dempsey had refused to talk to the unions before the protest. Within a few days after it he was talking to them.

An Post management is refusing to honour the national wage deal and is withholding payment to the workers, claiming an inability to pay.

Dempsey is supporting management's refusal to pay. This is

a state owned company. So claiming “inability to pay” is a joke when there is a 1.5 billion euro surplus.

A union rep told *Socialist Worker*: “We are owed 3% since 2003 and 2½% since 2004. But under the terms of the partnership agreement they can plead inability to pay.

That's not partnership. There is nothing in partnership for the workers. We all feel very negative towards it.

What they want is to dramatically change our work practices before they will pay us what is owed.

If we give these changes our lives won't be worth living. There is no way they will get this through”

The real issue behind this strike is that An Post Chief Executive Donal Curtin and An Post management have been given the blessing of the government to take on the unions and turn this company into a private profit driven entity.

They don't have any conscience about the social and necessary role of the post office. Instead they see it as a chance to make profits for private delivery companies.

Workers are, however, prepared to fight to save the service.

A union rep told *Socialist Worker* that he believes there will be further action. “We are very determined.

After the powerful demo people

have really gelled together to fight management. We saw workers there from every corner of Ireland and the unity among us is 100%.

We have a mandate for further action and will take it if this is not sorted out in the LRC talks.

We all see this as management trying to stick it into us and create a crisis in the company. But we have fantastic strength and determination.

They will not get away with all their spin and lies and try to blame us the workers for what is just their greedy fingers in a public service pie.

Inside on Page 7 read interviews with postworkers and CWU reps from around the country

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Brid Smith on the strategy of the campaign

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Thomas Kador looks at the struggles of the past year - In Ireland and internationally

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Richard Boyd Barrett, Ivana Bacik and Dermot Connolly discuss the prospects for a new left.

A History of Radical Film

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Roy Hassey traces the history of a different type of Hollywood

## Iraqi resistance continues despite massacre in Fallujah

THE CRISIS in Iraq is getting worse by the day. The main Sunni Muslim party pulled out of the election race saying the violence plaguing areas north and west of Baghdad made a “free and fair vote” on January 30 impossible.

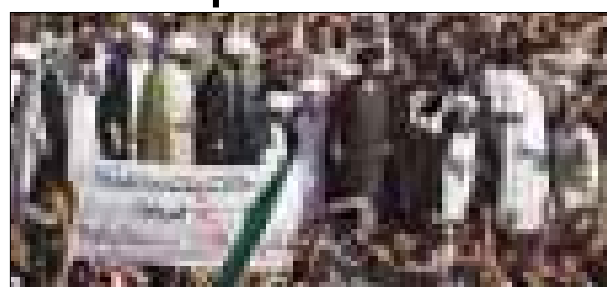
Meanwhile the last six months of 2004 proved the deadliest period for US forces in Iraq with over 500 soldiers killed.

The siege of Fallujah was planned to send a message to the resistance that defiance was futile in the face of the

world's most powerful military.

The full force of America's arsenal, F-16s, tanks, and Apache Helicopters were unleashed on the city. Two weeks into the campaign, the US military claimed victory saying they had “broken the back of the insurgency”.

The truth is very different. Pockets of resistance still maintain a grip on parts of the city and violence has spread throughout the Sunni triangle, with Mosul the latest city to



flare up.

The horror of daily life under occupation is visible in the evidence of America's war

crimes in Fallujah. On December 24th, residents of the battered city were allowed to return to their homes only

to find that 60 percent to 70 percent of the homes and buildings were completely crushed and damaged.

Over 250,000 people have been expelled from their homes. The Red Cross estimates that over 6,000 civilians were murdered.

See Page 3 & 6 for more on the upcoming elections and the March 19th Global Day against the Iraq Occupation Info at: [www.occupationwatch.org](http://www.occupationwatch.org) and [www.irishantiwar.org](http://www.irishantiwar.org).

## RTE lends crucial support to National Roads Authority propaganda

by MARK WALSH

WAS IT a strange coincidence that on the same day [Monday 13 December] that the NRA had a full page ad in The Irish Times on the proposed M3 that RTE did a report on Six One on "the challenges faced by the road builders"?

Introducing the report, Brian Dobson informed us that "bats, fairies, and salmon posed the biggest challenges to these road builders." Eileen Magnier then took up the story in a tone that recalled Bertie Ahern's comments about snails holding up road projects or having to consult the swans in Swords:

"First it was the local bat population – six different species! ... Protection for the valuable mo salmon was next..." and so on.

This is nothing short of propaganda, of the kind that is more commonly found in the Irish Independent. On 8 August this year, the following headline appeared:

"Fears rare plant will delay bypass for 10 years." (Judy Murphy, Irish Independent, Sat 8 August 2004)

As the Green Party said, it is a disgrace that the NRA is using taxpayers' money to fund an advertising campaign promoting the M3 Tara route. But it is not all that surprising. This kind of project is a cash cow for companies such as National Toll Roads – just look at the M50!

But it is even more outrageous that RTE should be using taxpayers' money to lend crucial, prime-time support to the NRA's agenda by selling to the public the idea that objections raised against road projects are trivial or ridiculous.

The state broadcaster should realise that it is not immune to the neoliberal agenda of Public Private Partnerships, i.e. the privatisation of road and schools infrastructure; the impending privatisation of Aer Lingus (news today that the Government is expected to give approval for some form of private investment); the privatisation of education (Hibernia College and the 'restructuring' or 'reform' planned for UCD, TCD and UCC) – and all of the other measures, many contained in the new EU Constitution, that seek to turn public services over to the market.

Sooner or later, public service broadcasting may fall under the same axe.

## WORLD SOCIAL FORUM



Flashback: Last year's World Social Forum in Porto Alegre

# Irish to go to anti-capitalist forum in Brazil

By KAREN MCCORMACK

THE NEXT World Social Forum will be in Porto Alegre, Brazil, from January 26 to 31, 2005. The World Social Forum has emerged as an important space for dialogue between a diverse range of people dedicated to making "another world possible".

After the first world meeting held in 2001, it became a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives to neo-liberal policies. 80,000 people from over 130 countries and 2,660 organisations attended the last Forum in

Mumbai.

The success of previous Social Forums in Porto Alegre, Paris, Mumbai, Florence and most recently in London is proof that the forums remain a dynamic political form. Important developments since the first social forum in Porto Alegre include greater participation of trade unions and immigrant networks, more cultural events and better gender balance. For the upcoming WSF the plenaries have been dropped to give more space and time to self-organised events, discussion from the floor and to increase collaboration

and dialogue during the event. This is a totally new way of formatting the WSF.

Other developments that will be hotly debated at the WSF include Lula's failure to bring real change for ordinary people in Brazil, Venezuela and Chavez, resisting US imperialism. The WSF takes place in Porto Alegre where Lula's PT lost control in recent elections.

The great strength in the movement is radicalism and diversity. The radical left has influenced the social forums in helping to form this opposition to the system. By embracing this new move-

ment, working alongside other people with many common goals and continuing to be open and confident with radical ideas, we will bring ourselves so much closer to that other world.

Rory Hearne and Michael O'Brien are travelling to the World Social Forum as representatives of the Irish Anti-War Movement. They will report back at public meetings around the country.

If you can donate funds for the cost of travel or are interested in organising a report back meeting contact 086 1523542

## IRISH FERRIES

# WORKERS CLAIM DEFEAT OF OUTSOURCING

BY BRID SMITH

THE TEN day strike at Irish Ferries ended just before Christmas following the intervention of the so-called Partnership group – The National Implementation Body (NIB).

The strike was very effective with workers in Irish Ferries telling Socialist Worker that they have won against management on the key issue;

"We came out on strike because of the way Irish Ferries were outsourcing jobs to workers from Eastern Europe. We have no problem with these workers but we will not accept the company's policy of pushing down their pay and conditions. What they want is a race to the bottom where we will all be forced onto low pay and poorer conditions."

"Our strike committee recommended that we go back to work after we were given a guarantee that outsourcing was off the agenda. That was why we came out in the first place and now we see the outcome of this as a victory. Our morale is very high and management's is very low."

"Our union SIPTU has told us that they will throw everything at fighting outsourcing in every industry. This country is dominated by a policy of pushing for massive profits with no regard for workers' rights. And we have been talking to workers in other companies who know that our strike was very important. This is an issue for all workers in this country."

Talks have been taking place at



the Labour Relations Commission and are continuing. They are centred around viability options for the Rosslare/Cherbourg route.

At the end of 2004 the company registered one of its ships with the Marine Department in the Bahamas. Their regulations on workers' rights and conditions are much poorer than those here in Ireland but the workers feel confident that they will not be forced into accepting outsourcing of labour.

According to one of the strikers: "We feel very strong after the strike and would be willing to go out again. Whatever the outcome of the talks in the LRC we still have to vote on any deal. So it will not get past us without a fight."

While SIPTU claims that outsourcing is off the table, media reports stated that the NIB urged both sides to attend Labour Court talks with no preconditions and that every option would be up for discussion. Irish Ferries have denied that its outsourcing plans are gone.

Workers will have to watch the talks carefully.

The outcome of this dispute will have huge implications for thousands of workers in other industries.

## POLICING PARTNERSHIP; THE NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION BODY

By OWEN MCCORMACK

The Irish Ferries strike was the latest fight to be called off after the intervention of the NIB. In a large number of recent disputes, workers were urged to return to work after this high level body intervened. Workers are led to believe that this is some kind of independent group but it is far from that.

The body has just three members; its chair Dermot McCarthy, (the Government Secretary General and Ahern's closest civil servant), Turlough O'Sullivan, the head of the bosses' organisation IBEC, and David Beggs of ICTU.

The NIB was set up in 2000 as part of the national pay deal the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF). It was to be another mechanism to police disputes and insure stability i.e. no strikes.

O'Sullivan constantly calls for cuts in public spending and for workers' right to strike to be curtailed, while Begg oversaw the privatisation of Telecom Eireann and disgraced himself and ICTU last year with his attack on anti bin tax protesters.

In every intervention NIB's first priority is to get strikes called off and then shunt workers into long-term talks in the Labour Court. It intervenes when workers are in a strong position to win a dispute by striking.

The Labour Court talks never deliver what the workers are fighting for but

some compromise that usually favours the employer. It first intervened in the Aer Lingus cabin crew strike in 2001 at a time when the strike was hitting the company hard and shutting down the airline.

In 2003 it instructed low-paid striking CPSU civil servants to return to work as their strike was in breach of the national pay deal!

While many union officials are eager to do as it says, it is toothless when confronted by a bullying employer. O'Reilly's Independent newspapers ignored its appeals when it cut 190 jobs with no union agreement last year. During the Irish Glass Bottle dispute, it again failed to deliver any concessions for the workers facing redundancies, promising only to keep in touch with the unions as the company ignored Labour Court recommendations.

The NIB is simply another arm of the Partnership process, a process that has stripped the union movement's ability to fight attacks like privatisation, stealth taxes, and increased demands for productivity. Partnership has seen the share of the country's wealth going to workers fall by over 10 percent during the Celtic Tiger boom as wage increases were kept down while profits and share prices reached the sky.

The NIB is committed to ensuring that process continues. Workers should be sceptical of its intervention.

**FAIR PLAYERS ACTION GROUP**



Residents protesting outside Dublin City Council offices

**People before profit development**

THIRTY RESIDENTS from Dublin 8 held a protest in early December on the steps of Dublin City Council at Woodquay to demand sustainable and socially responsible development. They lodged their objections against the proposed 11-acre development of the Player Wills/Bailey Gibson site. The site includes a 28 storey block and 4 x 14 blocks of apartments, no green spaces, no play areas, and over 2,000 car parking spaces. Over 750 signatures were collected by the Action Group

and the Tenter's area Residents Association. Sinéad Ní Bhroin, interim spokesperson for the group, said: "The Council appears determined to destroy the Liberties area of Dublin with inappropriate and badly planned developments and their refusal to provide sufficient social/affordable sustainable housing for the inner city area." They plan to fundraise in the New Year to pay for the architect and planner to help the community develop its own proposal for the site.

**IRISH ANTI WAR MOVEMENT**

**Eye witness of Fallujah massacre and resistance**

DR. ISMAEL Khan is a medical doctor from Fallujah. During the war he was chief of Junior Doctors in Baghdad, dealing with the devastating human carnage that resulted from the US invasion.

At a packed public meeting organised by the Irish Anti-War Movement last month he spoke of the brutal reality of life in occupied Iraq.

He spoke alongside independent journalist Lee Gordon who was also working in Fallujah over the last year.

They showed a film and slide show to give a visual account of the US siege of Fallujah in April this year.

It was a moving in-sight into the truth behind the lies we are being fed everyday in the mainstream media.

It was disgusting to see the brutal treatment of ordinary civilians by the US soldiers.

One soldier who was being interviewed boasted about how he loves to scare people and there was footage of soldiers interrogating women in the streets.

Ismael talked about how his 66-year-old father was dragged from his bed one night in front of his young daughters, brought up to the roof and



Dr. Ismael Khan speaking at a packed meeting in Dublin last month

brutally interrogated. A little girl of about eight explained to him how she lost all 25 members of her family when a

bomb was dropped on her house. Ismael said, "I hope that the plane that dropped that bomb didn't pass through

Shannon airport".

It showed how the Iraqi resistance, which is mainly the ordinary civilians who have lost, loved ones in the bombing have an amazing spirit.

One man said, "Our history shows that we have led many revolutions. The Iraqi's are fighters. We will fight any force that comes to occupy us, suck our blood and steal our resources. We will fight them with force". Ismael pointed out that the revolution of 1920 that kicked out the British started in Fallujah and he hopes it will be Fallujah that kicks the U.S out of his country.

Lee Gordon's footage was not used by British TV because it showed the occupation in a bad light.

www.irishantiwar.org

**VIKING WATERFORD**



On a field trip to Woodstown Viking site

**Protect our heritage**

FIFTY PEOPLE recently went on a field trip organised by the Save Viking Waterford Action Group (SVWAG) to the Woodstown Viking Site.

Like hundreds of others, they had heard of the Viking site but official disinterest in informing the public meant they could find little or nothing about the details.

SVWAG was formed in September to campaign for the preservation of the Woodstown Viking Site, just outside Waterford City, the discovery of which was made during the preparation for the Waterford bypass.

The Waterford bypass is to be built under a Public Private

Partnership scheme, whereby a private company is hired at taxpayers' expense to build the road and then operate a toll on that road to make huge profits.

SVWAG has launched a website, collected thousands of signatures, held public lectures with leading academics, produced a fact-sheet outlining what is known of the Woodstown Viking Site, produced a quarterly newsletter, organised a field-trip to Woodstown, and addressed several local schools.

SVWAG Chairperson, Dr. Catherine Swift of NUI Galway, said: "It would be absolutely criminal if we fail to

protect this site now by handing the responsibility to a private road contractor.

"The government will be doing a grave disservice to the people of Ireland if it divests itself of its duty to oversee and protect Woodstown.

"We are calling on Dick Roche to order the full excavation now and to ensure that this excavation is funded by the State.

"We cannot tolerate these delaying tactics any longer."

For more information or to sign the petition, go to www.vikingwaterford.com or email save@vikingwaterford.com

**ANTI-RACISM**

**McDowell's residency plans are not enough**

McDOWELL'S 'AMNESTY' for 17,000 parents of Irish-born children was both cautiously welcomed and criticised at a protest organised by the Civil Rights Movement of Ireland (CRMI) at the Dáil on Thursday 16th December.

Representatives from the Romanian, Moldovan, Kosovan, Filipino, Islamic and African communities supported the protest.

Socialist Worker interviewed a number of those in attendance.

Their real names are not used.

Johann said: "McDowell's measure does not provide for, but in fact excludes, any possibility of re-unification with spouses and non-Irish born children who have had to remain abroad."

It is therefore "profoundly inhumane as it perpetuates the state of families being torn apart by the arrogance of a bureaucratic and inconsiderate government." "Moreover, parents of Irish-born children form a tiny minority among a much wider community of immigrants and asylum seekers, many of whom have been living in a state of uncertainty for years and unable to support themselves due to being denied the legal right to work.

"This is a point on which Irish standards differ from those of any other EU nation.

"None of these problems have been tackled by Mr. McDowell's 'amnesty.'

"It doesn't even justify being referred to in such terminology."

Mr. Mark Khan, the Labour Party councillor from Lismore, Co. Waterford, who attended the protest, described the current situation of immigrants as "disgraceful and open to abuse from all sides".

He called for a regularisation of all people currently in the country.

He also called for the implementation of a new immigration system with a "clear and transparent way of applying for green cards".

Mr. Khan characterised the current regulations as an "unacceptable system that too much resembles bonded labour."

"If there is a free market, there must be a free movement of people," he pointed out, adding that the only way of combating human trafficking was a "more fair and open system of immigration".

Anything else, he concluded, would be "mere rhetoric".

A representative of the Afro-Asian People's Democratic Islamic Congress (APIC) present at the event described the decision as a "cosmetic measure".

"This is typical of the hypocrisy inherent in the EU's approach to migration," which he characterised as a "socio-economic strategy that bases maximum profits on maximum exploitability."

The pre-condition for this

scheme is a legally defenceless labour force both in their countries of origin and within the industrial nations into which they migrate.

"It is a vicious circle that migration laws are designed to keep in force."

There was a strong feeling among indigenous Irish and non-Irish born participants in Thursday's protest that a much wider regularisation scheme should be introduced.

The next meeting for the Civil Rights Movement is January 17th at 8pm in the Portobello Hotel.

The campaign is building a database of racist incidents and is planning a large anti-racist carnival on April 2nd (the international day of action against racism and for migrants' rights).

If you have experienced racism, or are looking for more information, then contact Luke at 086 3152597.

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## BIN TAX CAMPAIGN

# After court case victory prepare for more protest

*Bin tax campaigners won an important victory in the Circuit Court in December. BRID SMITH, Dublin City Campaign Against the Bin Tax PRO outlines Dublin City Council's attempts to force payment and the campaign's response*

THE DUBLIN City Campaign Against the Bin Tax won a significant case in the Circuit Court in December.

The case was an appeal by Robert Flood of Crumlin against the District Court which found him guilty of not paying bin charges for 2001 and 2002. Justice Lindsay ruled that the City Council had failed to provide an incentive for recycling for those years and dropped the charges. As we go to press it is still unclear if the Council will appeal this case to the Supreme Court.

The implications of the ruling are that all non-payments for those years are now null and void. It could also mean that those who paid for bin charges for those years may be entitled to a refund.

This is an important victory for the campaign. There are still thousands of households engaged in non-payment. This is evident from the 20 percent non-cooperation with the Council's programme of mechanisation.

During 2004 the City Council spent hundreds of thousands of euro on mechanisation of the bin trucks and on a survey to register all bins. Thousands of people did not register and are still non-compliant.

While working class people face poverty due to these charges, *Socialist Worker* has learned that the contract for the mechanisation of the trucks was given to the son of one of the managers of the refuse section of the Council.

## Council workers and pay-by-use

FROM JANUARY 2005, bills for bin charges will be issued on a quarterly basis and will take into account the number of times the bins are left out for collection.

There is no agreement yet with the council workers and the unions for fully operating this service. Council bin trucks will lift each bin and the computer will then read a chip which will indicate if the bin needs to be collected.

(However if it is wet, which is not an irregular occurrence in this country, the computer will not be able to read the chip.)

The workers are left in limbo because they don't know how



Anti Bin Tax campaigners demonstrating

much the pay-by-use system will affect their working week.

They can't measure how much time they will lose or gain by working the system and no agreement for compensation or job losses has been reached with the Council's management.

However, they are prepared to work the pay-by-use scheme on a pilot basis so we can expect a full collection service for the first few months of 2005.

The campaign received fantastic support from the bin workers over the last few years. Many of them are members of the campaign and like most PAYE workers believe the bin charges are a form of double taxation.

An important development for the campaign is that unions told the City Council that they will not be subject to the health and safety risks they faced last year when the campaign engaged in pickets on depots and blockades in the estates.

We should continue to build the links between council workers and the campaign.

All of the bin depots across Dublin were leafleted by the campaign in the run up to Christmas, thanking the workers for their support and looking forward to their cooperation in the future.

## Time to step up a gear

WITH THIS new system and the disgraceful increase of 76 percent in charges, the opposition to the bin tax must step up a gear.

Thousands of threatening letters have been sent out to non-payers from the Legal & Trade Debt Collection Agency.

They are trying to bully people into paying their arrears, even though the Court ruling could mean at least 50 percent of those arrears may now be illegal.

With the pay-by-use system introduced from 2005, the Council can argue that they now provide an incentive to recycle.

In January the campaign will be organising local public meetings to keep everybody informed of the details and to work out a clear strategy for the coming year. But the message remains the same: DON'T PANIC

AND DON'T PAY. The campaign needs a large demonstration to the Dail in the New Year.

Some media commentators are already admitting that the Campaign Against the Bin Tax got it right.

The bin charges are being used as a form of double tax. The cost is going through the roof and is rising each year well above inflation. Even the waiver system is now under threat.

In Limerick the city manager has been advised that with the privatisation of the service, the council is not obliged to provide waivers for low income families.

Dublin City Council appear to be following in their footsteps. For 2005 they are sending out only 25 tags for bags to people with waivers.

That is equal to half a waiver for the 52 weeks in the year and they constantly tell us

they have a very generous waiver scheme.

The pay-by-use system may seem fairer to many people but it will not resolve the issue of illegal dumping or the terrible lack of recycling facilities in working class areas.

The system also penalises large families, particularly those with kids and sick family members.

Only a fully funded public refuse system with adequate recycling facilities in every area can resolve the crisis of waste management.

Industry is the biggest offender, accounting for 85 percent of rubbish in landfill.

This is where the Government should hit out and tax them to the hilt – not PAYE workers.

■ For more info on the campaign contact Brid at 087 9090166

## Galway City Hall protest at plans for further bin charge increases

by DETTA MCLAUGHLIN  
DOMESTIC REFUSE charges in Galway were introduced at £70. Now people face refuse bills of €352 per annum.

And they are proposing to increase charges further. Galway City Council sent out threatening letters to householders to frighten people into paying outstanding bills before Christmas.

They informed them that their refuse collection service will be withdrawn from January 2005 if they do not pay up. 1500 people have not paid any of their charges; others have paid a nominal amount or are behind with installments that are financially crippling them.

The removal of domestic rubbish is an essential public service that cannot be based on a neighbourhood's ability to pay for the service. Non-collection will jeopardise public health and must be challenged.

We cannot let the Council leave rubbish to pile up on our streets.

There are already over a hundred licensed private refuse collectors in Galway.

There is no guarantee that the service will not be fully privatised here and that the 3000 households in receipt of a waiver will continue to be exempt from charges.

Galway Bin Charges Campaign (GBCC) held public meetings throughout the city and demonstrations outside the City Hall.

We have the support of the four anti-bin tax Labour councillors, the Socialist Workers Party, Sinn Féin, a Fine Gael councillor and an Independent.

This is as a direct result of the pressure from the campaign. The Council budget has yet to be voted on. GBCC, backed by the Galway Council of Trade Unions, will continue to pressure the councillors not to agree a budget that includes bin charges.

We plan to get the community and bin workers involved to tackle confiscation of bins or non-collection of domestic refuse, and to defeat this outrageous double tax.

# The battle to save An Post



## Action speaks louder than words

DOZENS OF Drogheda postal workers joined their colleagues on the streets of Dublin. The Drogheda branch recently had a one-day unofficial strike and a two-month stand-off with local management to guarantee overtime pay.

Workers from Drogheda explained to Socialist Worker what they have learnt in Drogheda - actions speak louder than words.

A postal worker said: 'The opinion is that we fight it or cease to exist. While we'd prefer to work in partnership through dialogue, if necessary we are quite willing to revert to old-style parlance,' he said.

'There's beginning to become a grass roots feeling, definitely in Drogheda and probably nationwide, that when the government can break its own agreements with impunity, what's the point of having agreements with them?'

## FF's neo-liberal plans for An Post

**A DROGHEDA worker said he was under no illusion that the game plan of An Post with tacit government agreement, is to introduce neo-liberal 'reforms', designed to slash workers benefits and gear up for privatisation.**

'The agenda of the EU is a liberal free-market capitalistic extreme, they want to open up the postal service to the market for profit, regardless of the service,' he said.

'And the current government would collude in that without being honest, or opening up the debate on the service - it is the people's service not the government's, despite what they think,' he said.

'This country was built by the workers for workers and the republican socialist Fianna Fáil Party has shown itself to be a federalist and capitalistic party'.

## An Post mistreats workers

ONE AN Post worker explained that at a local level, his union branch was in battle with management to ensure they could both work in a safe environment and to work with dignity and pride.

Until very recently they were forced to work in a 'death trap' of a building on the main street of Drogheda. The management also refused to be pay for voluntary overtime. When employees decided not to work overtime An Post responded by physically blocking all the post office boxes in the area for two months, cynically trying to blame the workers for the disruption to the service.

What the Drogheda postal branch is facing is merely a local reflection of what is going on nationally, with An Post refusing to enter any type of meaningful discussions with union leaders.



DENIS CONWAY and BRID SMITH interview postworkers on their views about the fight against An Post management and Government plans to reduce wages, services and privatise An Post.

TALKING TO Socialist Worker, the General Secretary of the Communications Workers' Union (CWU), Steve Fitzpatrick stated that there was huge anger among workers at the way An Post management treated them.

'They are angry that they are waiting 11 months for the wage agreement and secondly the management team make board level decisions with absolutely no consultation.

Just before Christmas the issue of the non-payment of the national wage increases was put in the hands of the National Implementation Body, a body which will investigate the company's defence of 'inability

to pay'. An Post is still to account for how within the first six months of Donal Curtin taking the reins, the company managed to go from a profit of one million euro to a loss of some 46 million'.

An Post Management are proposing a series of negative changes in return for the pay increases. Changes include the following:

- loss of duty holding
- no overtime pay for certain work
- complete flexibility between jobs, of workloads and of start time
- availability to work anywhere

within a 30mile radius of their home

- loss of seniority
- abolition of company medical scheme
- introduction of a "yellow pack" starting rate of pay

## Real issue - making An Post private

The real issue behind this strike is that CEO of An Post Donal Curtin (of former ESB management) and An Post management have been given the blessing of the Government to take on the unions and turn this company into a private profit driven entity. They don't have any conscience about the social and necessary role of the post office. Instead they see it as a chance to make fat cats even fatter.

One union rep told Socialist Worker "Last May the Minister was hand in glove with management to try to force a crisis when workers in the Dublin Mail Centre were suspended.

"At the time a Senior Civil Servant leaked to the unions that Donal Curtin had discussed with the Minister for Communications the strategy of orchestrating a crisis in the company and have the workers crawl on his terms.

But with the local elections looming and a strong united response from the union they pulled back from this.

## Action will step up in New Year

Mr Fitzpatrick also indicated that the action would be stepped up in the New Year if the money owned was not forthcoming.

'There's only a certain amount of those one day protests you can do,' said Mr Fitzsimons. 'At that stage it

## Subsidise not privatise

'WHAT SHOULD be done and what is beginning is that the CWU and the Trade Union movement should be demanding the government recognise its responsibility to the service and give subvention to it,' a worker said.

He explained that there has been no significant increase in the price of a stamp in 20 years, where 'any other business that didn't have an increase in that time would have gone out of business 15 years ago'.

will be real industrial action, it will be a matter of the national executive as to what type.'

What is decided however is the clear mandate from members who voted almost unanimously for industrial action.

A postal worker who has been active in his local branch said: 'Either we win or loose outright, we are fighting to keep our homes and feed our families, we have no option but to fight 100 per cent. It is better to be knocked down than lie down.'

Commenting on the speeches at the protest, the worker said: 'The head guy from SIPTU spoke and said he recognised it was an attack on all.'

## National strike and the cracks in Partnership

'I think they should get in touch with Aer Rianta and the busses and go on a national strike,' he said. 'It's high time the traditional left in this country ceased following a policy of appeasement and remember who this country belongs to.' Another worker said 'They want to undo every single achievement of the trade union movement of the past 90 years by a government sponsored body.

'It's union bashing, the scary thing is if they get away with it, ICTU might as well disband because if they do it to one they'll do it to all, all trade unions will be under threat,' he said

Mr Fitzpatrick commented: He said because the government itself, as the An Post shareholder, was not paying the workers, it called the whole national partnership agreements into question.

'The CWU traditionally supported them as they felt they would get more than from within the company, now they can't even get the national agreement,' he said.

'I, and any other postman, am being asked to subsidise the customer.

'It's like asking a driver in Bus Eireann or Iarnrod Eireann to pay half their pay for the passenger's ticket', he said

'An increase in productivity by degrading it is irrational, and like the health service, the post is pivotal to Irish society, so it's actually immoral to degrade it.'



## Public will lose service and their pocket

UNDER COST cutting planned by An Post there would be no guarantee of delivery in rural communities. If you live around the Dingle Peninsula, for example, it costs around €15 a letter to deliver in order to make a profit. The result is that many will be left without a service.

A postworker from Drogheda added: 'The old woman who lives in a rural area and who depends on personal mail or social welfare or doctor's appointments will be guaranteed a service, so she is left more alone than ever.'

The sad truth is that for some elderly people the only contact with the outside world on a day-to-day basis is with the postman.

Proposals also include no guarantee of delivery to businesses that do not get much mail, which will affect smaller businesses.

Closing down SDS would hit small businesses which depend on this service to convey parcels both nationally and worldwide. SDS does special rates for regular customers. A post worker predicted that 'if they have to post parcels from Kerry to Dublin or parcels to Manchester, they just won't be able to do it and the knock on effect is a loss of jobs'.

Although the workers, through the CWU, agreed to a radical restructuring of SDS after the company threatened to close it down in 2002, uncertainty still remains over its future.

If this does close down, the obvious question is who is going to deliver the parcels?

Private courier companies are waiting gleefully as they could get a bit of the action and charge more for the service reaping profits for themselves.

# Electoral Smokescreen in Iraq



**A year ago Iraqis held mass demonstrations demanding free and fair elections. The elections at the end of this month fall well short of their demands.**

By SÍOFRA NÍ CHONGHAILE

WITH OVER 1,300 soldiers dead, George Bush badly needs the January 30 elections as proof that his 'war on terror' is working. All evidence suggests otherwise. Many areas of Iraq are awash with election posters but an impressive range of individuals and candidates are boycotting the electoral process until a timetable is given for the complete withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq.

Although elections are expected to shift power to the long-suppressed Shia community, leading Shia voices, such as radical cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr, have called for a boycott. Sunni Muslims are also rejecting the elections.

The Association of Muslim Scholars, incorporating 3,000 clerics from the highest Sunni religious authority in Iraq, has backed the boycott as a protest against the US occupation and the attacks on Fallujah and Mosul.

## Election Flaws

The election on January 30, if it takes place, will elect a 275-member parliament to draft a constitution and organise further elections for December 2005. The elections have been criticised for a wide range of reasons.

Many believe that the designation of the entire country of 26 million people into one single constituency will result in a total lack of transparency. In addition, only 25

UN observers have been allocated to monitor the process. Another factor is the disenfranchisement of thousands of Iraqis.

Fallujah's 300,000 citizens will be prevented from voting as well as an estimated 35,000 detainees. Of those entitled to vote, increasing numbers are disenfranchised daily as home and checkpoint searches result in the loss or confiscation of documents.

There is doubt as to whether the elections will really be free and democratic. It is unlikely that the US administration will tolerate a Shia-dominated government alongside neighbouring Iran, also cited by George Bush as part of the Axis of evil

## US manipulation

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) approved \$80 billion for the use of US-based NGOs to 'educate Iraqis on the democratic process'.

Among USAID's aims is "the furtherance of America's foreign policy interest in expanding democracy and free markets". Grant recipients include the National Endowment for Democracy, a body created under Ronald Reagan to enhance overseas political influence through activities which would be illegal in the US.

It was most recently linked to opposition parties in Ukraine and coups in Venezuela and Haiti.

## Fallujah - liberation US style

According to *The Washington Post*, once the residents of Fallujah are permitted to return to their homes they will face a barrage of restrictions on movement:

Entry will be restricted to five roads, each manned by US checkpoints, and granted only to those who produce ID cards. Private automobiles will be banned from the city.

Fallujah will be vetted by US intelligence for work on the reconstruction of the city. In other words, only those deemed to be non-insurgents will be able to support their families.

## US Weakness

January's elections are a smokescreen for the continued US presence in Iraq. The Iraqi resistance is gaining victories every day. Most recently, the 20km road from Baghdad International Airport to the Green Zone (the HQ of the US occupation) was declared off limits

due to attacks on convoys. Equipment and supplies are airlifted around Iraq rather than transported by risky ground convoys. Last November saw the highest American monthly death toll of the war so far. 5,500 US troops have already deserted and in 2004 for the first time in a decade military recruiters fell short of their target. Far from sending troops home, the Pentagon has had to extend tour-of-duties and has called in extra forces.

With Iraq in flames, US soldiers deserting and a growing resistance movement, one wonders if George Bush's New Year's resolution might just be to think twice before he brings "liberation" to Iran or Syria. For socialists in the West, our resolution has to be to continue to support both Iraqi resistance and dissent within the US military by strengthening the anti-war movement at home and organising now for the international day of action on March 19th.



**Iraqis return to their destroyed houses in Fallujah**

## A growing resistance, an empire in trouble

By RORY HEARNE

**THE MASSACRE** in Fallujah and the sham upcoming elections have deepened the resistance in Iraq. Insurgents are increasingly able to "operate at will", evident in the devastating mortar attack that killed 22 in a mess tent outside Mosul.

Ordinary life under the occupation is fueling that resistance. In Fallujah, the siege is ongoing. A city of 250,000 has been evacuated; as many as 20,000 American servicemen have been engaged in the operation with "the largest concentration of heavy armor in one place, since the fall of Berlin".

The "reconstruction" has systematically stolen jobs from needy Iraqis and handed them to foreign firms, sending the unemployment rate soaring to 67 percent. As part of the conditions to Iraq's debt being written off the IMF wants Iraq to implement a strict austerity programme and to eliminate the programme that provides each Iraqi family with a basket of food – the only barrier to starvation for millions of citizens.

The resistance is creating deep problems for the US and UK forces. The reality is the current army in Iraq is under resourced and under-sized. The US has already had to remove troops and armour from Europe and Korea to boost numbers in Iraq. Army recruitment figures in the US are dropping. Powerful voices in Washington are urging an exit from Iraq after the 30 January elections – if they go ahead.

US hopes now rest on a Shia coalition led by a pro-Iranian cleric winning those elections. Yet these represent forces George Bush held up as the epitome of evil a short while ago. As we enter 2005, it is worth remembering that the empire is not all powerful. The resistance in Iraq and the global anti-war movement have held US forces back from storming on from Baghdad to Damascus-let alone Caracas or Havana, and any pullout from Iraq, however it is presented, will be seen as a humiliation for the US.

*"It is the presence of US troops that is provoking violence on a daily basis... The US plan to bring elections to Iraq seems designed to spark a civil war - the civil war needed to justify an ongoing presence for US troops no matter who wins the elections. It was always clear that the Shia majority, which has been calling for immediate elections for more than a year, was never going to accept any delay in the election timetable. And it was equally clear that by destroying Fallujah in the name of preparing the city for elections, much of the Sunni leadership would be forced to call for an election boycott"*

Naomi Klein – commenting recently on the Iraq elections

# 2004 – a year of resistance to imperialism and war

2004 was a year of strife and war but also resistance. Occupied Iraq suffered brutal assaults such as Kerbala and Fallujah, George W. Bush was elected, McDowell's anti-immigration referendum was passed and the housing and hospital waiting lists continued to grow. But also in 2004 people across the world, with a confidence not witnessed for decades, challenged our governments, the corporations and Imperial powers. **Thomas Kador** gives an account of that resistance.

Clearly the movement has ceased to be just reactive against corporate greed and war. The movement is now on the offensive.

This is shown by the global days of action that have brought millions on the streets and the alternative summits (WSF and ESF). In Ireland and around the world people are making the links between corporate power and imperial warfare, between local struggles – for decent public services, working conditions or pay – and global issues such as corporate dominance and permanent warfare.

January 16th - 21st	Mumbai, India	4th World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai. 100,000 people attended the demonstration opening the event. <a href="http://www.wsfindia.org">http://www.wsfindia.org</a>
January 27th	Belfast	3,000 on the streets against racist attacks
February 5th & 6th	Belfast and Derry	Thousands of civil service workers and NIPSA members walked out of their workplaces over low pay and intimidation by management
March 14th	Spain	Jose Maria Aznar's Government is thrown out by the Spanish people. Hundreds of thousands took part in illegal spontaneous protests across Spain.
March 19th & 20th	Iraq and around the World	Millions rallied on the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. In Baghdad on the 19th a demonstration uniting Sunni and Shia Muslims denounced the occupation
March 20th	Dublin	5,000 protest in Dublin for in support of the demands 'End to the occupation of Iraq and Palestine - US military out of Shannon', protests also in Belfast and Shannon.
March 26th	Across Italy	National Strike against spending cuts and neo-liberal reforms planned by the Berlusconi government. Over 300,000 striking workers took to the streets
April	Cities across Iraq	Shiite uprising against US occupation. In Sadr City, the US army killed 50 protestors. In Najaf, 20 demonstrators were killed. Naomi Klein: 'The war against the occupation is now being fought out in the open, by regular people defending their homes and neighbourhoods - an Iraqi intifada'.
April 16th	Montreal, Quebec	10,000-strong union protest with housing and anti-poverty groups
April 25th	Washington, DC	Over 1 million people took part in the largest Women's Rights march ever to demand regime change in the White House and preservation of women's right to control their bodies.
May 1st	Dublin	Two peaceful demonstrations of 2-3,000 people march towards EU ministers meeting in Phoenix Park against an 'EU of capital and war'.
May 28th	Cities across Columbia	24 hour strike against NAFTA free trade agreements and protests in all major cities in Columbia. 300,000 teachers strike.
June 4th & 5th	Rome, Italy & Paris France	Thousands protest at the visit of the US president George W. Bush.
June 13th	Seoul, Korea	Ten thousand Korean trade unions, farmers' organizations, NGOs and Filipino migrant workers were attacked by riot police while marching against the World Economic Forum.
August 15th	Caracas, Venezuela	Hundreds of thousands celebrate as the Venezuelan people defy the US by supporting Hugo Chavez in a recall referendum. Chavez gained 58 percent of the votes.
August 29th - September 2nd	New York City, USA	500,000 people protested at the Republican National Convention
August & September	Cities across Germany	100,000 protest every Monday against social cuts in some 250 cities across Germany. The protests started with an unexpected 10,000 strong demo in Magdeburg. Suddenly, large-scale protests filled the streets of German cities echoing 1989.
September 6th	Inner city Dublin	After extensive campaigning by residents, including a 200-strong public meeting, the council's plans for St Michael's estate are rejected by councillors.
September 14th	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Workers from Argentina's 200 re-occupied factories marched in Buenos Aires. They demanded that their government legalise the expropriation of factories which were abandoned by owners and run under direct workers' control after the collapse of the country's economy in December 2001.
October 17th - 19th	London, England	Over 50,000 delegates from across Europe attend ESF. Over 70,000 demonstrate against war
November	Dublin	'Patients Together' march in Dublin over shameful situation in A&E departments and call on the government to take immediate action
November 2nd	Falls Road, Belfast	Several hundred took to the streets in disgust at attacks on immigrants
December 7th	Dublin	Anti Bin Tax Campaigners win a High court case against the charges.

# Socialist Worker

## A caring, sharing government – for the wealthy

THE NEW caring and sharing face of the Government in the South, presented to us all on budget day, slipped away as 2004 drew to a close to reveal the same old government of corruption, who serve only the interests of the rich and powerful.

Minister for the Environment, Martin Cullen last year referred to bin tax activists as scroungers, yet he then wasted €300,000 on a PR consultant. Mary Harney rushed through legislation on the last day of the Dail, which disgracefully legalised the charging of pensioners for care in public nursing homes.

Figures from the Office for Social Inclusion show that the State's spending on social protection is just 61% of the EU average. In the area of disability, it is just 39% of the EU average and in old age it is 28%. Meanwhile, the government allows the wealthy avoid tax of €10bn a year.

The tragedy is that instead of mobilising opposition, the Labour Party voted for the Bin Tax and helps Fine Gael to re-build themselves. Sinn Fein demonstrated that they too can implement the neo-liberal agenda when they were part of the assembly in Northern Ireland. The An Post strike and anger over low pay in the civil service, however showed that there is a mood to fight back.

Those on the left, anti-capitalist activists and Socialists must get active in workplaces and communities to support and mobilise that grassroots opposition, in particular the bin tax campaign and in Northern Ireland, the water charges campaign. As pointed out in the debate on the new left, it is urgent that steps are taken both North and South to construct a new alternative left that can mobilise and give voice to working class dissatisfaction.

Internationally, the Iraqi resistance deepens day by day. It appears the elections will go ahead but significantly none of the Sunni Parties are supporting them. Regardless of the outcome the resistance will continue and therefore, the global demonstration on March 19th against the occupation and the use of Shannon by US military is a vital event.

The World Social Forum in Brazil at the end of January will be an inspiring launch of 2005 as another year of resistance, with the movement planning to descend on Bush and the G8 in Scotland in July.

## A new movement—a new paper

IN THIS period of political radicalism and rising struggle there is a feeling of excitement and hope that we can challenge capitalism, that has not been seen since the sixties. The new movements of resistance represent the only hope that humanity can overcome the chaos and destruction of global capitalism.

Socialist Worker is deeply involved and committed to building these new movements. The new style and content is a reflection of that commitment. It will provide a forum for debate on ideas and perspectives from across the movements, providing deeper political analysis and frontline reports from campaigns.

It will also debate the strategy and way forward for the new struggles, for example new left alliances, the Bin tax campaign or postal worker's dispute. It aims to strengthen the resistance by giving information and a voice to those involved in that struggle, whether it's the resistance in Iraq, the tenants in St Michael's estate or immigrants and asylum seekers.

Socialist Worker will continue to present a voice for the alternative and socialist left that is not afraid to confront the neo-liberal agenda. Together we can construct the radical left and socialism as a serious force on the left and within the movements.

## Join the Socialists

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Debate

# IS IT TIME FOR



Irish Ferries workers fighting out-sourcing of their jobs at the end of last year

*In the face of war, neo-liberalism and a right-wing government at home, how should the fragmented forces of the left in Ireland respond. Three left-wing activists from different backgrounds and perspectives debate where the left should go from here.*

*Comments from readers of Socialist Worker are welcome and a selection will be printed in the letters page of following issues of the paper.*

**IVANA BACIK,**  
 Barrister and Law lecturer, Trinity College Dublin

**T**HIS HAS been a bad year for the left. The re-election of George W. Bush, the escalation of the war in Iraq, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and Bertie Ahern declaring himself a socialist – all disheartening for those of us who now find ourselves apparently on the same side of the political spectrum as the Taoiseach!

So it is a good time to ask if a new left is possible in Ireland. We have to be realistic about the context. During the boom years of the Celtic Tiger, incomes doubled and unemployment fell from 18% to 4% between 1990-2000, and we became a more affluent nation. This is positive for most people and we are a more liberal and progressive society as a result of greater prosperity and inward migration. But it is hardly a time to be advocating socialist economic principles, you might think.

Yet there are many cracks in this façade of economic wealth; chronic

under-investment in our public services; especially health and education, while the gap between rich and poor has widened. Meanwhile, some of the top earners are paying effectively no tax at all, thanks to tax avoidance schemes from the Government.

How can we address this on the left? Despite the greater affluence, there is a real anger among people, particularly over the lack of investment in public services and increasing polarisation.

This was evident in the recent local elections.

We on the left can build upon this anger in three ways. Firstly, we must emphasise greater resources for public services (only a left-wing government will be committed to provide the level required). Secondly, a fair tax system with a minimum effective tax rate, which everyone would have to pay; and tax avoidance schemes such as the greyhound and racehorse exemptions should be abolished. There should be a property-based tax

to target speculators who sit on land for years driving up house prices. Decent public services cannot be achieved without a fair taxation system, and a fair taxation system is the most effective means of redistribution of wealth.

Finally, we need to form a broad consensus on the left as to how we get our message across. There has been far too much infighting over the years. While some of this is inevitable, it has weakened our ability to achieve any sort of sizeable political alternative to the right-wing or neo-liberal parties of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the PDs.

Groups on the far left must recognise that these right-wing parties are the real enemy, and should not waste too much energy on attacking the Labour Party – the only party on the left with sufficient support nationally to have the capacity actually to achieve political change, founded upon the ideals of James Connolly and linked to the trade union movement. What we can all agree on, in opposition to the ideology of neo-liberalism, is a shared commitment to collective action to achieve equality. Let's work together to develop a framework in which a more equal society can be built.



# A NEW LEFT IN IRELAND?

**DERMOT CONNOLLY,**  
PRO Dublin City Campaign against the Bin Tax  
(personal capacity)

The past decade of unprecedented growth in the Irish economy has apparently transformed Ireland into one of the richest countries in the world. The vast majority of working people, however, do not feel they are in some sort of capitalist paradise. Far from rising all boats, the 'celtic tiger' is the most unequal society known outside of the US.

The top 10% of earners earn 47 times that of the bottom 10%. This is the result of almost twenty years of so called 'Social Partnership'.

It is not just a question of wages, or transfer of wealth to the rich, but a collapse of active trade union organisation in the workplace. It would be a moot point to argue, that today, in terms of real resistance to the employers on a day to day basis, that we have gone back to pre-1913 levels.

The transfer of wealth to the rich is astounding. In 2003 eleven people earning €1 million a year paid zero income tax; at an estimated cost to the state of €8 billion a year, Corporation Profit Tax was cut from 40% to 12.5% and Capital Gains Tax from 40% to 20%.

The effect of this robbery of the nation's wealth on our underfunded social services is plain to see. Ireland has the most unequal provision of health care in the world. If you are poor you are three times more likely to die a premature death and your life span will be seven years below the average.

A real alternative is needed

This situation cries out for a real alternative to be built, capable of mobilising working people to resist the bosses' offensive and fight for real change. The Labour Party have no intention of providing that alternative. They are preparing to go into a right-wing coalition with Fine Gael. The only apparent opposition to this within its ranks are those who want to leave open the option of coalition with Fianna Fail.

It is in this context, we should view the vote gained by the small forces of the socialist left in last summer's local elections. Candidates with a record of struggle, such as over the bin charges, achieved very creditable results, despite the swing to Labour and Sinn Fein.

Some 26,000 votes were won across greater Dublin. In the state's poorest and most working class constituency, Dublin South Central, 5,800 votes were won. And important gains were made in South Tipperary and Cork city.

It is necessary to build on these small but important steps forward. For this reason, groups and individuals involved in those elections, struggles opposing the bin tax, racism and war, trade unionists and community activists, are coming together.

We want to discuss how we can work together more effectively and what steps can be taken to help lay the foundations for a new movement/party/alliance of forces to organise and represent working people. While recognising that the creation of such a force is not an immediate prospect, we believe it is time to begin the discussion and to take it into the unions, working class areas

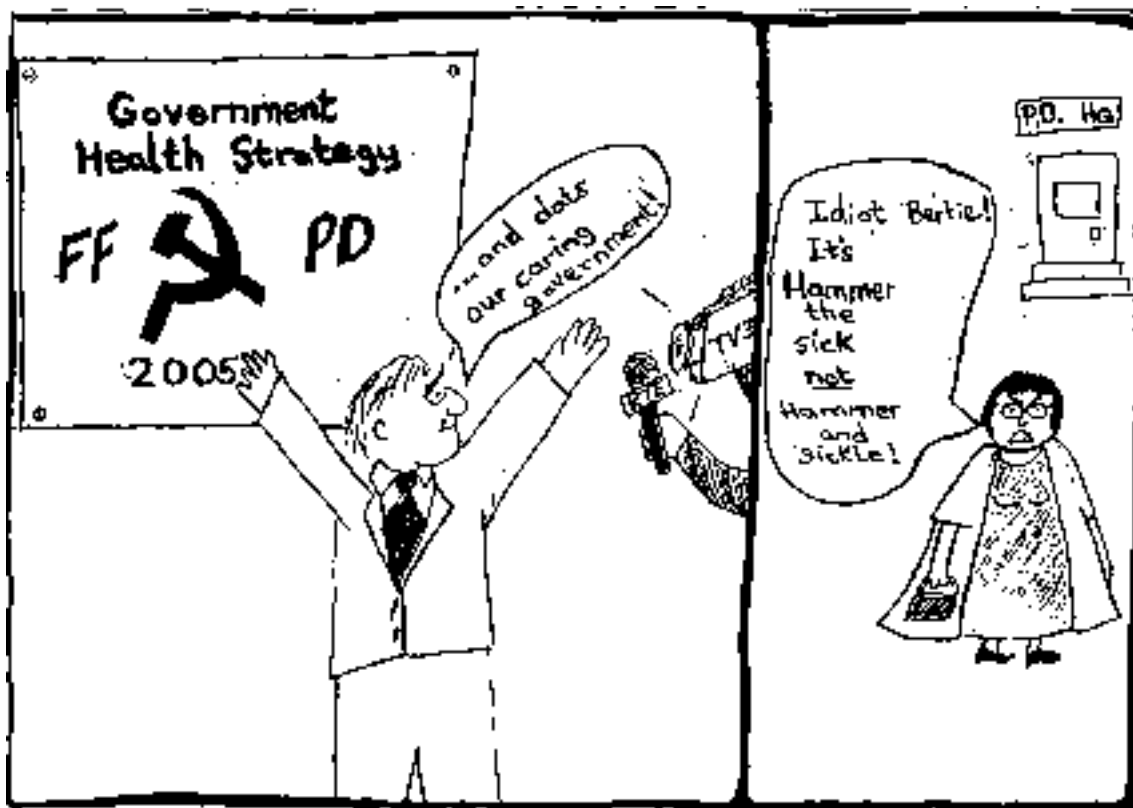
and into the various campaigns and struggles that will open up.

A way forward for a new left I believe that there will be a positive response to this discussion from hundreds of union, community, anti racist and anti war activists. It is not our intention to set up another left group in opposition to those already existing.

We will seek to work with groups like the SWP and the SP on a principled and agreed basis. Neither is it our intention to set up a debating society. In order for the idea of building a new and broad movement of the left to be taken seriously by workers, those advocating it will have to show in a real way that they can work together, and are prepared to engage in serious activity and struggle on the day to day issues faced by working people.

I am both optimistic and enthusiastic that a way can be found to take a number of important steps forward in the next year or two. Neither I, nor anybody else, has all the answers to this, but answers can be found, if people are prepared to work together, to discuss openly and not just talk at one another, and especially if a real base is built among working people and their views are brought into the discussion.

These steps would hopefully include, (a) those involved in the very wide range of struggle and activity to establish some sort of mechanism for working together, which would not be, or be seen to be, a front for any political grouping, (b) to create a real and broad opposition to partnership in the unions, (c) to prepare the ground for a significant national list or alliance of genuine left candidates to fight the next general election and (d) creating a mechanism for a serious, principled and fraternal discussion of different viewpoints on what programme, type of organisation, strategy and tactics provide the best way of advancing the cause of working people



**RICHARD BOYD BARRETT,**  
SWP candidate Dun Laoghaire and Chairperson of  
the Irish Anti-War Movement (personal capacity)

THE LAST two years show that a new left is urgently needed in Ireland. In that time, impressive movements of opposition to war, privatisation and environmental destruction have sprung up in the country

There was the swing against Fianna Fail in recent elections, the protests against our government's collusion with US war on Iraq, the battle against the bin tax in late 2003 and campaigns against incinerators and against plans of greedy private developers eating up public spaces have mushroomed.

These new social movements in Ireland are a reflection of the new global or anti-capitalist movements that burst on to the world stage at the Seattle WTO protests in 1999.

These are a response to twenty years of policies that reduced taxes on the rich, cut back and privatised public services and have led to a spectacular growth in the gap between rich and poor. They are also a response to the new phase of US led militarism and chaos locally and internationally.

The demands of the new movements should provide the programme for any alternative political force; redistribution of wealth, oppose privatization and defence of public services, environmentally sustainable polices, democratic control of global resources, cancel third world debt, opposition to war, occupation and the arms trade; opposition to racism and anti-immigration discrimination

Social democrat and Labour parties' rightward shift

While these attacks on working people and Bush's war have created the basis for a new movement, they have also exposed the weakness of the existing left.

Social democratic or Labour parties like Blair's New Labour, Schroeder's SPDs and the Greens in Germany have shifted right in recent

years and found themselves in confrontation with the new movements

In Ireland, the failures or betrayals of the mainstream left have not been quite so dramatic - mostly because FF and the PD's have been in power for so long. However, the Labour party, the Greens or Sinn Fein have not been central to mobilising any of the big movements that have developed and indeed have opposed grassroots movements.

Labour and the Greens both voted for the bin tax and Sinn Fein, although part of the campaign in Dublin, voted for the bin tax in Sligo. Labour has failed to articulate clear opposition to privatisation. All three parties consider coalition with Fianna Fail or Fine Gael or both.

The failure of the mainstream Irish left is reflected in the fragmentation of the anti-government vote in the recent elections. All sections of the left gained ground but no single left party has become a dominant vehicle for left opposition.

The role of the socialist left

The Socialist left, although starting from a low base, made a significant impact. Fragmentation and sectarianism, however mean they are quite a long way from being seen as a viable alternative at a national level.

The weakness of the Irish left has meant that the main opposition to Fianna Fail is another right-wing party - Fine Gael. This is a tragedy, particularly when the combined vote

for left of centre parties has now reached 50 per cent for the first time in Irish history.

A majority of Irish people share left-wing sentiments but there is no credible or consistent left alternative to represent them and the new grassroots movements springing up. The challenge for the Irish left is to create that force.

It is clear that the leadership of Labour and the Greens are incapable of doing this. In the case of Sinn Fein they have made it clear they are willing to consider a deal with Fianna Fail as they did in Sligo. In the North, when in government in Stormont, Sinn Fein Ministers implemented privatisation of health and education.

This leaves the socialist left. The Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party along with small numbers of left independents have played central roles in both the anti-war and anti-bin tax movements as well as many local struggles.

These forces are too small to offer a viable alternative nationally on their own. Sectarian habits and petty squabbling have hampered efforts to create a new united left. These bad habits have to be ditched.

With the exciting growth of real social movements for the first time since the late seventies, there is an urgent need for the socialist left to take themselves seriously and put forward a united political alternative that matches the spirit of the new movements.

A new political alliance of the left that can challenge seriously across the country is a task that must not be put off any longer. If we fail to achieve this soon an historic opportunity will be missed.

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THE SELFISH GENE:

# IS HUMAN NATURE A BARRIER TO A BETTER WORLD?

*Are we destined to live in a world of poverty and greed because natural selection inevitably means 'survival of the fittest'? Does a co-operative gene exist? TOMMY WILLIAMS, a science student in Trinity examines the evidence.*

DARWIN'S THEORY of evolution by natural selection is often described as "the single best idea anyone has ever had".

It is the unifying theory of biology and has revolutionised the way we think about the natural world and our place in it. The moral and political implications of the theory remain highly controversial.

The right, sensing their power, have attempted to adopt it for their own ends. This distortion — misleadingly called "Social Darwinism" — has led many on the left to distance themselves from Darwinian ideas.

This is a mistake, because Darwinian theory is a powerful way of understanding the living world.

Despite its many biased, lazy and simplistic interpretations, we do not need to fear what it has to tell us about human nature.

It was not Darwin, but the right-wing social theorist Herbert Spencer who coined the term "survival of the fittest" in 1851. Darwin accepted it as a useful, but limited, shorthand for natural selection.

## "Natural selection" and "survival of the fittest"

TODAY THE two — "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest" — are treated as one and the same.

But it is the metaphor, not the theory, which has been used to justify social inequality.

There are two basic lies at the heart of this defence of meritocracy, or "law of the jungle" economics: firstly, that the capitalist system somehow resembles natural selection; and secondly, that this makes it a good thing.

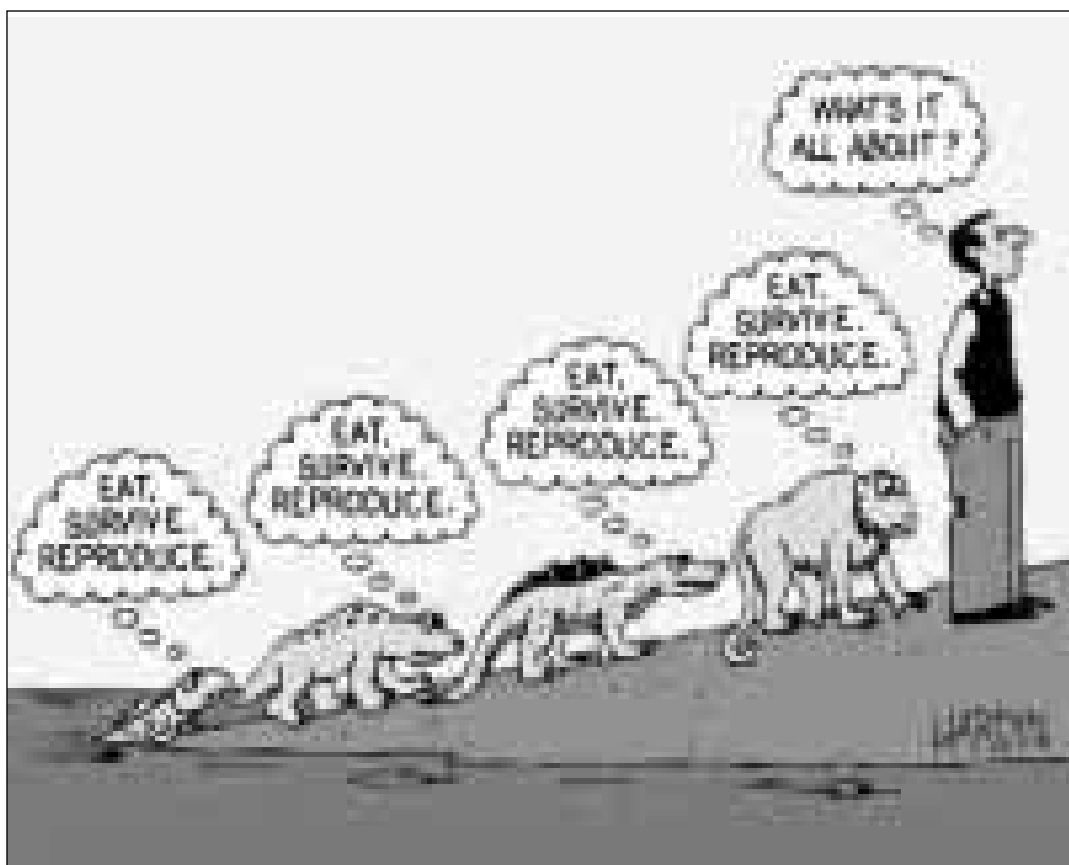
In natural selection, the fittest organism (living thing) is simply the one which contributes the most offspring to the next generation. There is no absolute definition of fitness — it depends entirely on context. The competition or "struggle for existence" that Darwin talked about was, again, a metaphor, suited to the times.

Over many generations, traits that enhance reproductive success, that is, traits that make an organism more suited to its environment, will become widespread in the population at the expense of traits that decrease an individual's number of offspring, given limited environmental resources. But this will only work if the traits involved are heritable, or genetic.

Natural selection can never apply to a society whose basic tenets are racism, sexism, nepotism, political corruption and educational inequality, because such environmental factors skew the level playing field of the real jungle.

For example, according to the 2000 HEA report *Social Background of Higher Education Entrants*, almost 100% of the children of parents in the "Higher Professionals" category entered third-level education, as opposed to 23% of the children of "Semi-Skilled" parents.

When you strip all the pseudoscience away the basic argument of the Social Darwinist is: "Look, this is



DNA, the blueprint for life. But are we governed by our genetic inheritance?

how bacteria live. Therefore, this is how we must live." However, we've evolved brains. Perhaps we should use them to build a better society, rather than worry too much about what bacteria are doing.

There is a much more fundamental reason to reject this "scientific" defence of right-wing ideology. Even if a "fair" version of capitalism could be established, where the criterion for success was ability alone (business acumen, physical strength etc.), why should this be a good society, just because it's "natural"? Murder, incest and rape are widespread in the natural world.

## Modern Darwinian ideas—Dawkins' Selfish Gene

REACTIONARY IDEOLOGUES have clutched gleefully at Richard Dawkins' ill-chosen phrase "the selfish gene" and have claimed that modern Darwinian theory has shown that altruism cannot evolve — thereby dooming notions of the "common good", or the welfare state, to failure.

It's an argument socialists come up against everywhere — that evolved human nature presents an insurmountable barrier to a fairer society.

This is rubbish. Not only does it go against experimental evidence (altruism is widespread in the natural world); it's a deliberate misrepresentation of what the words mean in the first place. Just as a toaster can't be philosophical, it doesn't make sense to talk about unconscious objects like genes being "selfish" or "altruistic" in the usual sense.

Richard Dawkins' biological

definition of selfishness is simply a refinement of what Darwin said 120 years earlier, i.e. that replicators good at propagating themselves will tend to become dominant.

In fact, one of the major successes of evolutionary biology in the 20th century was to rationalise how genuinely altruistic behaviour can evolve by natural selection.

The experiments of the biologist John Maynard Smith conclusively showed that there was no conflict between "selfish" genes and altruistic behaviour.

He took the "Prisoner's Dilemma", a game usually played by economists, and applied it to biology to investigate the relative benefits of selfishness and altruism as strategies that individual organisms might evolve.

## The "Prisoner's dilemma"—co-operate or selfishly defect?

IT'S A model of what can happen when the interests of the individual conflict with those of the group, usually expressed as follows: two criminals who have just completed a robbery together are caught and interrogated separately by the police, who do not have enough evidence to convict either suspect on the most serious charge.

Each suspect has two choices: she can either "cooperate" with her partner, telling the police nothing; or she can "defect", which means incriminating her partner in exchange for a more lenient deal for herself.

Smith assigned a number of points to each possible outcome of the game, with the aim of determining the best strategy for the individual criminals. If

both suspects cooperated, neither saying anything, they would both be convicted on a lesser charge, for want of evidence (3 points each).

If one cooperated and the other defected, the defector would do very well — getting off lightly (5 points) — but the co-operator would face a long jail sentence (0 points). If both defected, both would do quite badly (1 point each), but neither would do as badly as the co-operator in the previous outcome.

Dispiritingly, there is only one strategy for either criminal to play here. Collectively, cooperation would be better; but individually, defection is the only sound strategy. But the game does not end here. For one thing, the "always defect" strategy is actually very rare in nature.

## A strategy for altruism and co-operation

NEXT, MAYNARD Smith investigated what would happen if the game was played many times, and gave the "players" brains so they could remember previous encounters.

He included a variety of strategies — some altruistic, others selfish — and ran a computer simulation to see which would triumph over many generations.

To the surprise of many, the winning strategy was a decidedly altruistic one called "retaliator".

It always cooperated on first meeting another player, but if that player defected it would remember it, and defect on them once as a reprisal before cooperating again. Over time, this was a far better strategy than the variations on "always defect", eventually coming to dominate the "gene pool".

Later, the political scientist Robert Axelrod showed that an even "nicer" strategy — one which forgave one defection before retaliating — quickly took over if introduced into a "retaliator" society.

## Human nature is not a barrier to socialism — capitalism is a barrier to human nature

LIKE EVERYTHING else in the natural world, brains were built by "selfish" genes.

Despite the right-wing rhetoric, it doesn't follow that everything with a brain will behave selfishly. What Maynard Smith showed was that with memory and intelligence comes a better way to pass on genes: cooperation.

This better side of human nature, however, cannot be harnessed under a system of centralised, unaccountable power such as modern capitalism. Without any chance of cooperation from the other side, defection is the only option, and everybody loses.

Darwinian Theory does not support the idea that human selfishness is innate — given a better option, we will take it. Human nature is not a barrier to socialism; capitalism is a barrier to human nature. What we need is the kind of society that makes cooperation possible.

# RADICAL CINEMA: Film and Social Change

Although cinema is often the most commercial of all art forms, the film industry has never been immune from movements for social change. The influence of the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements is easily identifiable in recent films like *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *The Corporation* and *Outfoxed*. In this article, ROY HASSEY looks at how radical cinema emerges during times of revolution and resistance.



OVER THE last century, progressive movements and changes in society have time and again opened up avenues for greater creativity and ingenuity in film.

Russia in the early 1920s, immediately after the revolution, saw an extraordinary flowering of innovation and artistic freedom in cinema. This new found freedom, inspired by the revolution, saw the development of new approaches to film.

Trotsky wrote soon after the revolution: "The chief aim of the revolution was the creating of human personality in the masses who were supposed to possess no personality."

This was the task that a new generation of filmmakers, most famously Sergei Eisenstein, set themselves. Inspired by the exuberance of creating an egalitarian society under socialism and the new opportunities for artists which came with the revolution, these filmmakers rejected the role of entertainers and created films to develop the consciousness of the masses.

## The 1940s – strikes, film and McCarthyism

IN THE US the 1940s saw a doubling of union membership with major strikes in rubber, steel, car plants and in the mines.

The Communist Party (CP) was well organised in labour unions and the artistic community. Many themes of films from this period reflected the influence the CP had in Hollywood: workers solidarity, trade unionism, collective action, anti-fascism, mockery of figures in authority. Left wing writers effectively created the *film noir* genre, with its dread, unease, alienation and disillusionment.

The fear of labour militancy and the influence of the CP led to the right-wing backlash of the Taft Hartley anti-union laws and the creation of the House of Un-American Activities Committee under McCarthy.

McCarthyism sought to eliminate any expression of advocating social change in films. Hundreds of films were scrutinised by McCarthy and his committee for 'subversive' messages.

An indication of the absurdity of the hearings reached was Ginger Rogers complaining that she had been forced to



Jean-Luc Godard (above), one of the leading directors of the French New Wave in cinema, meanwhile society was in turmoil as students protested in May 1968 in Paris (top)

resign the presidency in 1968.

He used montage, i.e. the exposition of narrative through rapid collision of shots; typage, i.e. the use of non-actors for their 'look', e.g. peasant characters being played by real peasants; and the Marxist Theory of Film, i.e. narrative moved forward through collective action with no central hero — the "single group protagonist".

The list includes luminaries such as Dashiell Hammett, Bertholt Brecht, Arthur Miller, Pete Seeger, Joseph Losey and Clifford Odets. Ten artists, the 'Hollywood Ten', were imprisoned for twelve months for refusing to testify.

Those who did name names and condemn fellow artists to the blacklist included Elia Kazan, Budd Schulberg, Lee J. Cobb and Ronald Reagan.

## The emergence of the French New Wave

THE 1950s became a period of artistic and social stultification in the US. In Europe, on the other hand, the end of the decade saw the emergence of the French *Nouvelle Vague* (New Wave).

The *Nouvelle Vague* developed against a background of considerable upheaval in French society. France had been defeated in Vietnam in Dien Bien Phu; it was bogged down in an unwinnable guerrilla war in Algeria; and the Fourth Republic was on the verge of collapse.

It was a period of modernity and revival in French society and a rejection of all that had come before. The *Nouvelle Vague* was the artistic embodiment of this societal transformation.

The former *cahiers du cinema* film critics who emerged to form the *Nouvelle Vague* — François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette and Agnes Varda — rejected the old 'cinema du papa' and developed an innovative, freer approach to film with hand-held cameras, non-professional actors, location rather than studio shoots and distortion of traditional narrative.

These directors saw themselves as artists and not technicians for hire, as many directors of the time were. They developed the 'politique des auteurs' where the director is seen as the author of the film and its creator in every sense of the word.

Similarly, in the 1920s Eisenstein's 'Revolution Trilogy' — *Strike*, *The Battleship Potemkin* and *October* —

expressed new technical and ideological approaches to film.

With the exception of Godard, who briefly aligned himself with a small Maoist cult and made films to "destroy bourgeois society", the *Nouvelle Vague* was never a political movement.

However, during the near revolution of May 1968, Truffaut and Godard led a strike which shut down the Cannes Film Festival, for the only time in its history, in solidarity with the workers and students on the streets of Paris.

Eisenstein's *October*, made in 1927, was edited by Stalin to excise all scenes featuring Trotsky, with Stalin telling Eisenstein directly that "Lenin's liberalism no longer applies".

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## 1960s and the "poetry of everyday life"

THE FRENCH *Nouvelle Vague* inspired other New Waves throughout Europe, particularly in Britain with the emergence of directors such as Lindsay Anderson, Tony Richardson, John Schlesinger and Karel Reisz, who for the first time portrayed ordinary British working class lives on screen and showed the "poetry of everyday life".

The Czech New Wave with directors such as Milos Forman, Jiri Menzel and Jan Nemeč also flourished until the Prague Spring in 1968 when Soviet tanks crushed the progressive reforms introduced by Dubček.

The 1960s were a time of extraordinary upheaval across the world, but particularly in the US where you had the civil rights movement, inner city riots and the anti-Vietnam war movement.

The anti-war movement in particular engendered a crisis for the American ruling class with millions of people across the country marching in every major city and forcing Lyndon Johnson

to resign the presidency in 1968.

This new movement led to a revolution in American film and the creation of the New Hollywood movement. New Hollywood brought together a collection of emerging filmmakers who wanted to reflect the changing attitudes in society and make films which were part of the movement and for the people on the streets.

## New Hollywood

NEW HOLLYWOOD saw a generation of filmmakers prepared to take real risks and reclaim American film as an art form and not a business.

In the space of less than a decade, artists such as John Cassavettes, Bob Rafelson, Hal Ashby, Terence Malick, Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman, Robert Towne, Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich and many others emerged, altering the landscape of American film.

In a short time they washed away old Hollywood and, as with the *Nouvelle Vague*, reclaimed the title of artist for filmmakers.

The films they created reversed the traditional morals of American cinema; the villains were now cops, parents, any figure in authority.

For the first time since the 1940s a moral ambiguity was introduced in US films along with an analysis of the drugs culture, strong female characters and black protagonists.

New Hollywood laid the foundations for indie cinema in the 1990s, which is now embracing the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements with the same enthusiasm directors regarded street protests in the 1960s. The past twelve months has seen the re-emergence of the political documentary with *Bowling for Columbine*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Fog of War*, *The Corporation*, *Outfoxed*, *Super Size Me* and others.

These new films show once again that great art emerges from great upheavals.

However, to create a period of sustained creativity that creates art rather than simply produces, it is necessary to move beyond the system which commodifies everything, and, as in Russia in the 1920s, bring art to revolution and revolution to art.

# Socialist Worker

€1.00/£0.70p

NO 234 | JANUARY 3RD-15TH, 2005

WWW.SWP.IE

## VICTIMS OF THE TSUNAMI — AND OF POVERTY

PEOPLE WERE shocked as pictures of the tsunami as it struck the countries of the Indian Ocean just after Christmas. Reporters told us that this was a natural disaster, an act of god, that it was unpreventable as the numbers of dead grew steadily day upon day.

True, the shifting of the underwater plates near Aceh province in Northern India was unpreventable, and the waves that resulted swamped parts of the Sumatran coast and within minutes.

However, the scale of the tragedy could have been reduced if money had been spent on an early warning system to allow other nearby countries to warn their citizens before the waves hit their shorelines.

If the Indian Ocean had a warning network like that in the Pacific many deaths could have been avoided. It was two hours before Thailand, Malaysia or India were hit, yet people were still in the danger zone without any knowledge of the coming danger.

The countries of the area, with many of the poorest populations in the world, are hamstrung by debt repayments to the World Bank and their governments are tied to the neo liberalist agenda. It's no surprise that they had neglected to invest in an early warning network, despite being urged to do so for 15 years by UN officials for Disaster Reduction. Many lives would have been saved if they had invested in such a system.

Many of the deaths - approaching 150,000 as Socialist Worker went to press and the final figure estimate is constantly revised upwards - were avoidable, and many could still be saved from the second wave of destruction, due to disease and poor sanitation, if enough money was



Devastation across the Indian Ocean

available.

While many tourists were killed, it should be noted that the majority of the people who died were the poor of the region, those who were least able to fend for themselves.

Early estimates of the disaster

suggest that over one third of those killed were children.

Many more will die as a result of poor infrastructure - lack of clean water and medical support. Their areas already neglected by poverty and the ravages of capitalism will bear

the brunt second mass of deaths.

Faced with a disaster of enormous proportions, there has been an outpouring of sympathy as Irish charities helping those injured in the region received over €3.8 million in the week following the tsunami.

Governments of the developed world have not shown the same generosity.

A high Ranking UN official was quoted by the BBC Website describing the contribution of the richest countries in the world, from the US to Britain, to Ireland as "stingy". Stung by these remarks, George Bush raised the US contribution to the restructuring of the region from \$15 million to \$35million, ending at €50 million.

This is less than what the US spends in two days in its occupation of Iraq. Bertie Ahern is no better, announcing first a contribution of €1m, then €2m and finally raising the figure to €10 million.

It sounds compassionate, but this is from the government who is cutting their overseas development Aid figure to make up for the VAT they promised not to collect from the Band Aid CD.

The concerns of the leaders of the western world are not with saving human lives. With Global Warming continuing and the chances of other disasters rising, a different priority for society is needed, one which values human life above profit and the dictates of the world bank.

## Pearson's Budget - Privatisation, Water Charges and Job cuts

By GORDON HEWITT

IAN PEARSON, intent on savaging the Public Sector in Northern Ireland after his victory in the NIPSA strike, has announced a budget which ensures water charges, increased rates, privatisation and massive job cuts.

In the wake of the collapse of the Peace Deal, Pearson announced a revised Budget for Northern Ireland.

He claims that the government will increase public spending by 20%, lower poverty, increase investment in infrastructure by 30%, and Health and Education will benefit.

But the methods by which the government, (or presumably the Assembly if it ever gets up and running) intends this to implement this will only serve to increase the already

desperate poverty that exists here.

The budget is based on water charges bringing in at least £50 or 60 million. Pearson has claimed that if this money isn't found through charges then the investment for health and education will suffer. The budget guarantees that most working class households will pay over £300 for water yet the business community pays very little for the water it consumes. It is no wonder then that

80 per cent of people oppose the charges.

Pearson's budget also relies on substantial rates increases. Domestic rates will rise by 9% over the next two years and 6% in the final year of the budget. The rise in the non-domestic sector will be a mere 3%. Working class homeowners will have to pay

hundreds of pounds on increases and water charges and thus subsidise non-domestic rates in the process. The business sector is therefore cushioned by the Government's hammering of working class families to raise finance.

The final part of the budget strategy involves slashing 2,300 Civil Service jobs over the next three years. In order to defeat the cuts all out strike action and campaigning for solidarity across the working class movement is required not just "selective action" in small workplaces.

This is not a strategy to reduce poverty. Even Minister Spellar admitted that in Northern Ireland, "one in seven people live in deprived conditions with unacceptable levels of employment, poor health and low educational attainment." Northern

Ireland with one of the lowest living standards in Europe, has wages on average nearly thirty per cent lower than the rest of Britain and 150,000 households exist solely on benefits.

Plans to restructure the Northern Ireland economy

Pearson said "These practises will radically improve the quality of public service delivery." But the budget is reliant on both Public/Private Partnerships and government borrowing i.e. loans and "traditional government investment." The aim is to reduce public spending while opening up health, education, transport and most likely welfare to the private sector.

This can only lead to further job losses (6-700 in the water service), entrenched poverty and a health and

education system run for profit.

While all major parties are critical of the budget, none argue for an alternative. The DUP for example were concerned about accountability and want a watchdog to ensure that "any money raised is carefully spent."

But there is an alternative. The Water Charges can be defeated by a non-payment campaign organised in local communities throughout Northern Ireland. In the new year such community groups will be meeting to organise people in their local areas to refuse to pay the charges. In February there will be a strike by water workers and a community day of action organised by the Trade Union movement and the local community groups to launch the movement against the charges publicly.