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GALWAY IN CRISIS:

CLEAN WATER IS A RIGHT

Dette McLoughlin

90,000 people in Galway have no access to safe water. All cooking and washing has to be in water that has been boiled for a full minute. Even the act of brushing teeth has to be carefully prepared for.

Astonishingly, for a modern western society, there is no end in sight to the crisis.

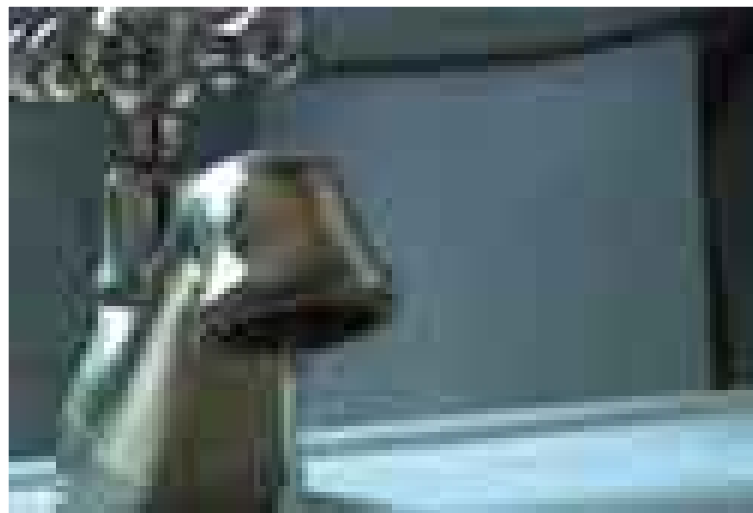
The problem of Galway's serious water contamination arose months ago, although it was only confirmed recently.

The fact that people had been falling sick in every neighbourhood since Christmas with vomiting, drastic weight loss, stomach cramps, and diarrhoea that lasted for weeks or was re-occurring, and was spreading from person to person, did not become an issue until cases began requiring hospitalisation.

The cause is the parasite cryptosporidium, which can be fatal. The health concerns of individuals did not, however, lead to a sense of urgency on the issue.

Only when the business sector identified that this could affect their profits in the service and tourist industry did the outcry reach national levels.

The roots of this problem are



deep.

As far back as 1996 a report for an anglers' association stated that the water from Lough Corrib was contaminated with animal deposits and that inefficient sewerage works and septic tanks were employed in treating the water.

Since news of the contamination broke, Minister O'Cuiv made a public announcement that 21.5 million euro had been made available since 2002 to upgrade water treatment schemes in Galway.

According to the government, the 'lethargic' attitude of the local authority and 'lack of focused attention' by local council members

has led to this incident.

The local councillors, however, had not been made aware of this allocated money. Only now is Minister Roche enquiring why this money has never been applied for.

One of the major problems is that only 70% of the water serving Galway is being treated to the highest standard, the other 30% is not. Inadequate filtration of human and animal waste being identified as a major problem.

Further, it would seem that if more thorough and increased water sampling had taken place sooner and more regularly this

crisis could have been avoided.

The areas affected are the city centre, Headford and Tuam mains water supply. The latest news reports that contamination can be carried by personal human contact, so a much wider area is at risk.

Socialist Worker asked Independent city councillor and general election candidate Catherine Connolly about the management of the crisis.

'The Galway City Manager and city council management team have shown the utmost contempt for the people of Galway throughout the crisis.

'At the City Council meeting on 12 March there was no mention of the pending crisis. The first time councillors knew of the crisis was through the media. Extraordinarily, on the same day as a local paper informed the public that "Tests give water clean bill of health", the City Council issued a press release informing the public that the water was indeed contaminated.

'They failed to attend a specially convened meeting to discuss the water contamination crisis in Galway City..

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DON'T ATTACK IRAN!
Make Shannon an Election Issue

If Iran is attacked, the Irish Anti War Movement has called for emergency protests immediately, including at the GPO, O'Connell St, Dublin at 6pm

THE THINGS THEY SAY

'This Ard Fheis is not about listing Fianna Fail's achievements in Government. They're too numerous.'

A delusional Minister Noel Dempsey at the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis.

'A flight of capital from the State will occur if Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats are not re-elected'

Tánaiste Michael McDowell.

'The light of learning has been all but extinguished for Sean today.'

Yvonne O Cuanachain following a High Court ruling that her autistic son Sean is not entitled to 30 hours Applied Behavioural Analysis tuition.

'When the State brings a referendum to the people and says "we love your kids", we need to remember the O'Cuanachain case and say to the State "Don't make us laugh".'

Kathy Sinnott, MEP

'I've heard that Bertie is now going to go green, which is rich for a Prime Minister who, as recently as three months ago, said he opposed nuclear power.'

Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary, a strange bedfellow for ICTU, which has also called for nuclear power to be considered as a possible energy option for the future.

'He didn't mean any disrespect to the House and is capable of multi-tasking.'

A spokesperson for Minister McDowell on the Tánaiste's decision to do the crossword during the debate on his Criminal Justice Bill.

'Jesus came to tell us everyone is wanted in paradise, and that Hell, about which little gets said today, exists and is eternal for those who shut their hearts to his love.'

Pope Benedict puts Hell and damnation back on the agenda.

'I will veto it if it comes to my desk.'

President George W. Bush, on a bill passed by the House of Representatives to withdraw American troops from Iraq by September 2008.

'The patience of the American people is running out.'

Outgoing US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, warns of growing pressure to commit to a timetable for withdrawal.

'The general felt it was best to move them out of that area.'

Army spokesman Lt. Col. Lou Leto, on the unusual withdrawal of a Marine unit from Afghanistan after an incident in which Marines from the unit were accused of shooting and killing civilians.

'Like the sinking of the Titanic, catastrophes are not democratic. A much higher fraction of

passengers from the cheaper decks were lost. We'll see the same phenomenon with global warming.'

Stanford University's Henry I. Miller on the growing climate divide, with wealthy nations far from the equator not only experiencing fewer effects of climate change but also better able to withstand them.

'If Prime Minister Sharon had lived... he is dead, isn't he?'

Britain's Kim Howells, Middle East Minister, has trouble with his brief. Sharon of course is not yet dead.

'Iraq is a land where blood flows between brothers in the shadow of an illegitimate foreign occupation and hateful sectarianism.'

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah opening the Arab Summit in Riyadh recently offends some of his friends in Washington.

'I unreservedly express my sincere sorrow and regret to you and your family for the irresponsible actions of some members of an Garda Síochána in failing to adhere to the professional investigative standards and procedures of the organisation that led to your wrongful conviction.'

Garda Commissioner Noel Conroy with a rare apology to Frank Shortt and his family.

'You and your smarmy pundits and the smarmy pundits you have in your pocket can take your war and shove it.'

Actor Sean Penn's message for George Bush

Save St Luke's Campaign takes protest to McDowell's doorstep



St Luke's campaigners outside McDowell's constituency office

Photo: Paula Geraghty

The campaign to save Luke's Hospital in Rathgar held a lively demonstration in the centre of Ranelagh this week.

A crowd of over 50 protesters made up of patients of St Luke's, friends and relatives and members of the local People Before Profit group gathered outside the constituency office of Michael McDowell to protest over government plans for St. Luke's.

The protest was organised jointly by patients and the local People Before Profit group.

'We are held this protest at Michael McDowell's constituency office as he is a part of the Government who made this decision.

'Today he should publicly state what his position on the

hospital is.

'The response from people around Dublin South East has been one of shock and anger that the government is closing St Luke's.

'Today is proof of that fact. The support locally is huge.

'We are leading a campaign to save the hospital. It is the pressures of privatisation and developers profit that lie behind the reasons for its closure,' said Rory Hearne, Candidate for People Before Profit in Dublin South East constituency.

'I am using the election to raise the voice of opposition of the patients and staff to a national level.

'We will fight on the ground and ensure this hospital is

saved.'

The protest took place right outside McDowell's office.

During the demonstration some people from the group moved out and stood on various points around the triangle in the centre of Ranelagh village with large posters condemning the closure of Luke's while others gathered petitions from passers-by.

Over time the crowd grew and for over two hours there was a lively and loud protest in the village.

At one point Michael McDowell made a brief appearance at his office.

When challenged to sign the petition calling for the retention of the hospital in Rathgar, how-

ever, the Minister flatly refused and ran off down the street.

The campaign is distributing thousands of flyers in the constituency stating clearly: No Hospital: No Vote.

We are telling people of the country not to vote for FF/PD candidate while the plans to close St Luke's remain in place.

At time of going to press the campaign were planning a major protest outside the Dail at midday on 4 April, with patients coming from places as far away as Donegal and Wexford to take part in the demonstration.

The campaign is gathering a petition on the issue which is available online at www.roryhearne.org.

INSIDE THE SYSTEM

✘ Dublin City Council's

commitment to providing social and affordable housing has fallen short of meeting actual need. The Council has, however, recently announced plans to build hundreds of units in Ringsend. Is it just an unfortunate coincidence that they are to be built on Dublin's Poolbeg Peninsula near the site of the proposed incinerator?

✘ A Dail debate on

new criminal justice laws collapsed after Sinn Fein's Aengus O Snodaigh called for a quorum. The government didn't have the required 20 TDs available to attend the debate. Hilariously the Government Chief Whip Tom Kitt claimed the tactic of calling for the quorum near the conclusion of the debate was 'mean-spirited and playing an old-style political game'. Maybe Tom should put more effort into ensuring his well paid colleagues actually turn up for work.

✘ A new report, drawn

up by TDs from all parties, has found that there is a link between the rise in alcohol consumption and the sponsorship of

sports events by drinks companies. The joint Dail Committee on Sport has of course stopped short of calling for a ban on alcohol sponsorship in case they ruffle the feathers of the powerful drinks industry.

✘ A proposal in the

Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, 2006, would further erode the basic human rights of asylum seekers and some categories of immigrants. Foreign nationals from outside the EU or European Economic Area without a permanent residence permit would be forbidden to marry each other or Irish and EU citizens.

✘ Preliminary results of

a quality of life survey, commissioned by Dublin City Council and carried out by the UCD Department of Urban and Regional Planning, found high levels of dissatisfaction amongst apartment dwellers. While apartments will soon account for 90 per cent of the Dublin's housing output, only a quarter of current apartment dwellers in the city want to live in flats in the future. Much dissatisfaction centred on lack of space, gardens and

external views.

✘ Tánaiste Michael

McDowell recently used the Government jet to fly to Cork airport. He was picked up by his State car which had travelled from Dublin earlier in the day and was ferried to he regional launch of the register of the Private Security Authority of Ireland and then onto a PD fundraising function. He returned to Dublin that evening in the government jet. That's quite a carbon footprint.

✘ A recent poll found that

60 percent of Afghans said that the US-backed government is more corrupt than the Taliban or the Soviet backed regime in the 1980s. The survey, by Integrity Watch Afghanistan, also found that 93 percent of Afghans say they have to pay bribes to access basic public services.

✘ Despite objections

from the US, India will go ahead with talks to buy natural gas from Iran. Both India and neighbouring Pakistan want to buy Iranian gas and transport it through a \$7 billion cross-country pipeline. The US says the project will help fund

Tehran's development of nuclear weapons but both countries are ignoring US wishes.

✘ The anniversary of the

abolition of slavery has been marked across the globe but a new report by Save the Children is a timely reminder that modern day slavery exists in some of the poorest and most war torn areas of the world. It is estimated that 218 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are working as modern-day child labourers; of those, 126 million are involved in hazardous work. Many are bought and sold, pushed into bonded labor or sexually exploited to repay debts.

✘ Documents recently

obtained under the US Freedom of Information Act reveal that Centcom, the main top-secret military planning unit at Donald Rumsfeld's Pentagon, predicted in its war plan that only 5,000 US troops would be required in Iraq by the end of 2006.

✘ Harvard professor

and former Clinton administration economist Linda Bilmes and Professor Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel

laureate economist from Columbia University have established that not only is the number wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan far higher than the Pentagon has been saying, but that looking after them alone could cost present and future US taxpayers somewhere in the region of \$536bn. According to Bilmes for every soldier dying in Iraq or Afghanistan today, 16 are being wounded.

✘ According to the latest

analysis of income in the US, income inequality grew significantly in 2005, with the top 1 percent of Americans receiving their largest share of national income since 1928. The top 300,000 Americans collectively enjoyed almost as much income as the bottom 150 million Americans. Per person, the top group received 440 times as much as the average person in the bottom half earned, nearly doubling the gap from 1980.

✘ A survey in The London

Independent of ten popular Easter eggs ranging from basic to luxury dark chocolate found that, by weight, they comprised

between 26 and 45 per cent packaging. By volume the packaging could be 90 per cent of the product.

✘ Mexico City's legislature

is expected to legalise abortion in a few weeks. Women, for years forced into dangerous backstreet abortions, will have the right to an abortion for any reason during the first three months of pregnancy.

✘ Newly appointed full-time

traffic superintendent for the West, Garda Supt James Fitzgerald, has been arrested for drink driving. He was just three weeks in the job

✘ The recently published

analysis of 2006 Census figures provides some interesting statistics on the changes that have occurred in Ireland. Non-Irish nationals make up 10% of the population- the largest group being from the UK. Muslims are now the third largest religious grouping, with 32,500 indicating they adhere to that faith. 186,300 people in Ireland today have no religion. There has been a 50% increase in the number of cohabiting couples and women are having fewer children.

Galway in Crisis: Clean water is a right

Continued from page one

As far back as the 18 March, five city councillors, cross party, myself included, requested in writing that a special meeting be convened, as the only source of information available to the elected representatives since the water crisis came to light was the official press releases from the city council press office.

'It appears however, that on the advice of the officials, the Green Party Mayor, Niall O'Brolchain, did not call the meeting.

'On 27 March, the city councillors tried again, through the party whips. This time the Mayor acceded to the request and called the meeting for the next day. The City Manager, however refused to attend, or to allow any of the officials to attend, saying the meeting was illegal. The meeting went ahead in their absence.

'The behaviour of the City Manager and officials beggars belief at a time when more than 150 people have been hospitalised as a result of infection from contaminated water, and Galway City faces one of the most serious crisis in its history.

'It appears that the problem cannot be resolved in the short term and that Galway's water supply will remain contaminated for the foreseeable future.

'Eleven city councillors were present at the meeting and we were unanimous in expressing outrage at the failure of the executive to attend the meeting. It was unanimously agreed that the City Manager would be asked to have experts from the Public Health Department and from consulting engineers to inform the Council Chamber on the health implications of the contamination and both the short and long term solutions required.

'It was also agreed that the City Manager would be asked to explain why no application was made for monies to upgrade the water treatment system.'

Minister Dick Roche called an 'emergency' meeting in Galway on 30 March to 'demand answers' and to try to solve the problem. He attended a FF fundraising breakfast on arrival, meeting with local FF ministers and councillors.

He then met with City and County officials and mayors, but did not include the elected representatives.

Catherine Connolly made representations with other councillors who had been excluded from the private meeting, saying this was the lowest form of party politicking.

Roche's

attempts to deflect responsibility from his own department ignores the fact that a preliminary report for a sewage treatment plant in Kinvara was submitted by Galway County Council to Mr Roche for his approval in October 2002.

Until that plant is built, waste is being washed into Kinvara Bay, an offshoot of Galway Bay, without filtration or treatment.

The people of Galway have received very little information concerning the contamination of the water supply. The information was dripped through on the radio and in local media. There has been no co-ordinated response by the councils or HSE to give individual households the maximum information.

Some people are still unaware that all drinking water must be boiled for at least one minute before being safe to drink or make ice; only pre-boiled water can be used in cooking and preparing food, for cleaning teeth, and washing-up. People are unsure if it is safe to shower or go to swimming baths.

Fuel bills are undoubtedly going to be much larger as water is continuously put on to boil in households with several children or shared houses. All shops are stocking up with bottled water, even stores that have not traditionally sold it, but this is not cheap.

Councillor Connolly conveyed that the city councillors agreed that clean water should be made available free of charge to the people of Galway, a motion which will be discussed at the next council meeting.

Meanwhile, there have been no special reductions in bottled water prices, nor is it easy to carry quantities for a family.

Many people cannot afford the doctor for re-occurring bouts of the bug, or if several members in one family get sick, if they are not on a medical card. There are possibly many more cases that may require urgent attention.

The citizens of Galway now await the outcome of Minister Roche's visit, but all in all, people lack confidence in their safety, in how the crisis is being handled, and the less well off have added financial worries too.

The extraordinary situation in Galway is one of the strongest examples of the need to reassert local democracy over unelected county and city managers and to build a movement that puts people before profit.

SUPPORT THE NURSES!

40,000 midwives and nurses, members of the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) and the Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA) have begun a national work to rule.

They have steadily built up momentum for the dispute, which is to try to secure a 35-hour week and a 10.6 percent pay rise. Both the demands are entirely reasonable and if conceded would bring nurses and midwives in to line with other health professionals.

Nurses and midwives, for example, are the only professionals in the health service working a 39-hour week; all others have a 35-hour week.

Talks held under the aegis of the National Implementation Body were terminated on 1 April, with no significant sign of progress by the HSE.

The willingness of INO leader Liam Doran to walk out of talks and turn to his members reflects the strength of feeling by nurses and midwives on the issue. 96 percent of INO and PNA members balloted earlier in the campaign voted for action.

Throughout the work to rule INO and PNA members are going to work as normal and are providing the full range of nursing/midwifery care to patients and clients.

There have, however, put a ban on all clerical, administrative



Nurses protest in September last year

and IT duties; attending non-vital meetings; telephone work except those deemed essential, on clinical grounds and a ban on opening/securing all community-based buildings and facilities.

Naturally, and despite the PR spin from the HSE, the work to rule is designed to bring pressure on management without jeopardising the health of any patient.

The strength of the campaign

is that it takes place in the run up to an election, against a government full of billion Euro promises.

The difficulty is that, precisely because of their concern for patient care, the INO and PNA are reluctant to escalate the action. But this will be needed. The HSE, and behind them, a government dogma that favours private over public health care, are not

going to yield without a fight.

There is considerable public and trade union support for the nurses and midwives. Local hospital rallies and the holding of a national demonstration are proven methods of harnessing this support.

They should form part of the plan of action in a campaign that every worker ought to get behind.

INO wins gains in Cork battle

By Paul Carroll

The standoff between the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) over the opening of a new €75m University Maternity Hospital ended on Saturday evening with 62 per cent of nurses and midwives voting in a ballot to work at the facility.

The new facility centralises the services of Erinville, St Finbarr's and Bons Secours hospitals into one state of the art complex that began receiving patients at 3pm on Saturday.

The facility was due to have opened on 24 April but the previous day, more than 98% of the members of the INO involved in the move rejected the Labour Court recommendation that they cooperate with the HSE staffing terms.

They categorically rejected that proposal that 64 student nurses be included in the 375 midwives and nurses to be employed at the facility and the INO deemed that the staffing proposals 'were unsafe, unsatisfactory and potentially injurious to mothers and babies.'

The INO claimed that the HSE had gone back on their previous agreement regarding staffing:

'For the past six months, at all meetings and in all public comment on this matter, the INO has consistently sought confirmation that the HSE in Cork, would be in a position to provide all of the qualified midwifery and nursing staff required for this excellent new facility.

'During this period we were constantly assured that staffing would not be a problem but, in recent days, the same management have had to acknowledge that they do not have the required number of staff, have not recruited the necessary additional staff, did not know how many midwifery staff would be coming from the private Bon Secours facility and were not in a position to confirm what level of temporary agency staff they could access.'

On Monday 26 the mud slinging was started by the PD-FF government when the Minister for Health and Children, Mary Harney, described the INOs decision not to go ahead with the pro-

posed opening as an 'an absolute disgrace' and claimed 'the issues have nothing to do with patient safety but are about money for individuals.'

This is a claim that is totally unfounded. Staffing levels for the facility were always the core of the issue according to the INO: 'At no stage, at the meeting of over 200 members, held on Friday evening to consider these proposals, was the issue of money or financial gain discussed with the total focus being on the complete lack of clarity and certainty about staffing levels.'

Liam Doran, INO General Secretary, described the comments as 'unfounded, ill-informed and insulting comments about this organisation's midwifery and nursing membership working in the Erinville, St Finbarr's and Bon Secours Hospitals in Cork City.'

Evidence provided by the INO has proven that staffing was always going to be the key issue upon opening of the facility, this included:

■ A copy of the staffing profile, provided by the HSE South management on Thursday, 22 March, showing that they only had 315 qualified nurses and midwives available with 60 posts currently vacant.

■ An extract, from an earlier contribution by Mary Harney, Minister for Health and Children, to the Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children demonstrated that 'the full midwifery staff complement will be 383 by the time all services are introduced on a phased basis by next December.'

■ An extract from a letter from the HSE (South), dated 23 March, which confirmed that the HSE 'do not have the full complement of staff available' and that they were seeking to recruit, as yet an unknown number, from all known on-call nursing agencies.

Following days of negotiations and continual pressure on the midwives and nurses, a compromise was reached and the new hospital was opened with an additional 20 midwives and nurses to the 315 that were proposed by the HSE the previous Saturday.

Also there will be 82 additional midwives, over the next 6 months,

with 27 of those posts coming on stream in April. Furthermore varying recruitment drives will commence both nationally and internationally.

'The INO is pleased that the new facility will now open with the required level of staff that satisfies our members legitimate professional concerns,' said INO General Secretary Liam Doran after the conclusion of negotiations, 'the recent difficulties were always about staffing and the immediate injection of 20 additional posts, which sees the opening of 128 beds today with 335 staff instead of the 315 available last Saturday, is proof that the previous concerns of our members were valid.'

The way in which Minister Harney handled this issue is an indictment of everything the PD's stand for: Business and manager orientated with no respect for those working on the ground.

Over the last 6 months the INO were assured that they would have the relevant number of staff for the facility. The HSE south then acknowledged that they would not have the optimum number of staff and then the INO took the appropriate ballot action.

Harney then created a smoke-screen and publicly slandered a group of professionals who have served for many years caring for women and babies by claiming they were being greedy.

The more the market is brought in to health care, the greater the pressure on working conditions. Cork midwives and nurses were absolutely right to make a stand at the outset to ensure this important new facility was properly staffed.

The gains they made are gains for all future users of the maternity hospital.

Paul Carroll is a freelance journalist based in Cork



Three hundred protesters made their way to CityWest Conference Centre on Saturday 24 March, where the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis was taking place. The lively demonstration was a reminder to FF that the vast majority of people in Ireland are opposed to the use of Shannon by the US Military and it proved that Ireland's implicit support for the U. S. occupation of Iraq is an election issue.

The call went out for all who oppose Irish collaboration Bush's war to make Shannon an election issue. Contact the Irish Anti War Movement to find out how you can help by emailing info@irishantiwar.org or visit www.irishantiwar.org

Photo: Paula Geraghty

WATER CHARGES WITHDRAWN FOR 1007/08

Now scrap them altogether

By Eamonn McCann



Demonstrating against water charges in Belfast recently

Photo: J Carax/Indymedia.ie

Continued from Page 12

The previous week, houses in rural areas received letters from Water Service (now NIW) Director of Customer Services, William Duddy, telling that the service was to be removed from the public sector on 1 April and that there'd then be a charge for functions that previously came free.

Many rural homes have a long-standing agreement with the Water Service for septic tanks to be emptied without charge. 'We are terminating current Agreements,' the letter unceremoniously announced. 'Charges for the new service will be phased in over the next two years.... We anticipate that they will start at around £25.'

In keeping with the escalation in proposed domestic charges, this will be doubled next year and trebled the following year.

The language of the letter was, again, instructive. The Water Service WILL transfer...The Agreement WILL no longer be valid...Charges for the new service WILL be phased in.

Any suggestion that the Assembly and Executive might reverse the changes wasn't taken seriously.

Against this background, a mass non-payment campaign is more necessary than ever.

Prospect

It was the prospect of mass non-payment that forced the water charges issue to the top of the agenda during the Assembly election and in turn forced the DUP and Sinn Fein to look to the Treasury for a one-year face-saver to ease their path into government.

The reason non-payment can sink charges and privatisation is that no com-

mercial enterprise would bid for a business where a sizable proportion of the customers who took the product were openly declaring they had no intention of handing over money in return.

Since the company cannot refuse to serve the customers - it's illegal to turn off a domestic water supply - their only option would be to take every non-payer individually to court. Which, given the likely numbers, would cause the court system to collapse.

The campaign for non-payment of water charges is thus a movement for democracy as well as for social justice and defence of the public sector. It is the best means of ensuring that the will of the people prevails over the edicts of unelected advocates of private greed over public need.

Water charges haven't gone away. We must show over the coming year neither has the non-payment campaign.

Campaigning for Housing Regeneration in Belfast

At a People before Profit meeting held after the anti water charges rally on Saturday, Tommy Wilson a local community worker in the Village area of South Belfast, spoke about the campaign to regenerate the Village.

He spoke to Socialist Worker after the meeting.

Why are people in the Village demanding regeneration?

'Well we have serious problems in the Village with social housing. The housing that exists is too small, about half of all social housing has only two bedrooms which is inadequate for many families and so people have been moving away to find suitable accommodation.

'Many of the houses have no baths or have baths fitted in what were bedrooms, many of the houses have outside toilets, and of course we have houses that have been boarded up because they are in such a state of disrepair.

We believe that our community deserves better than this and so we have argued with people don't move out, let's fight for regeneration.'

What happens if you don't win the campaign?

'Well what has been happening is that housing that is rundown is given over to private landlords, who buy up the houses, do them up and then sell them or rent them out at really high prices.

'They often exploit students and ethnic minorities who they force to pay ridiculously high rents. We think if we don't fight against this not only will people who live here be forced out but it opens the door for private development elsewhere.

Sandy Row

'We think this could happen in St James or Sandy Row, so we also want to link up with residents in those areas to campaign against the same thing there. This is significant particularly with St James because that is a Catholic area and the Village is predominantly Protestant.

'The way we see it, we are fighting for poor working class people and if the Village loses then so does St James or Sandy Row or the Shankill. These areas are all close to the city centre and developers want to get their hands on land and houses in these areas so they can make a fortune at our expense.' What's the situation so far?

'We have asked for 100 per cent regeneration. We have been offered 40 per cent but we think only twelve per cent of that is for social housing. That isn't on. We are fighting for as much regeneration as we can get.

'We don't want to hand the Village over to private developers and speculators. The sad thing is that about a mile up the road there are people living in luxury apartments.

A bit further on is some of the wealthier areas and yet we are really suffering. It's heartbreaking to see some of the conditions we live in when up the road the well-off have got it so good.

'So far we have put the housing executive and the government on notice and we'll take our campaign to the Assembly as well. As I said if they beat us they will go for other areas around here so it's more than just a campaign for regeneration of the Village, it is for regeneration generally.'

Bin Charges are coming to Northern Ireland

By Gordon Hewitt

Close to 250,000 households have had microchips fitted to their bins so that equipment can be tested which will later be used for bin charges.

An article in the Daily Mail lifted the lid on the bin charges trials.

The New Labour government has paid for the chips to be installed in three areas of Northern Ireland: Newtownabbey, North Down and Craigavon.

These microchips will be used to gather

information about the weight of rubbish being thrown out and calculate pay scales for the disposal of household waste. This measure was introduced just prior to the Assembly election.

While the local councils have denied getting ready for a 'pay as you throw tax' it is clear that we will see this on the agenda when the Assembly is up and running.

Bin charges fit with the 'pay for what you use' or in this case 'pay for what you throw out' philosophy

that underpins privatisation.

This philosophy tries to convince people that it is democratic for people to see themselves as individuals, rather than as part of a collective society, and so they should look at everything they do as if they are an individual consumer.

Often this can appear to many people as a fairer way of dealing with public services,

it suggests that you are getting a fair deal because it offers what



Fighting Bin Tax in Dublin

many people think is a cheaper deal, but the truth is this is an attack on working class households.

The introduction of

a flat tax not based on ability to pay benefits wealthy people at our expense. They get the cheaper deal while we pay a higher

proportion of our income than we should and that we can ill afford.

But that's not all. It is an attack on whole the idea of public services. It suggests public services can be run more efficiently by private business, yet there is no evidence for this anywhere.

In terms of bin charges, critics of the schemes say that bin charging reduces the amount of recycling as people tend to burn rubbish at home or dispose of it illegally. Rubbish is often

piled up in alleyways and local laneways as people seek to avoid another charge they cannot afford to pay.

This leads to infestations of rats and insects and other vermin as well as creating a health hazard as the rubbish is not collected and disposed of.

Given the Assembly's commitment to privatisation it is more than likely we will be waging an anti-bin charges campaign in Northern Ireland very soon.

EGYPT IN REVOLT



Cairo protesters defy Mubarak's crackdown

By Simon Assaf

The Egyptian regime is attempting to silence any criticism directed against it by pushing through changes in the constitution. The US-backed president Hosni Mubarak is trying to dress up the changes as "democratic reforms".

Mubarak has unveiled a series of constitutional amendments that would allow him to dissolve parliament, give free rein to suspend civil liberties and imprison anyone he deems to be a "terrorist threat".

The changes would curb the powers of the judiciary to monitor electoral fraud, and ban the creation of any "religious" political parties. That measure is aimed at silencing MPs belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's main opposition.

The constitutional changes, which were put to a referendum on Monday of this week, sparked a wave of demonstrations and protests across the country. Opposition groups called for a boycott of the poll and denounced it as rigged.

An Egyptian newspaper published a memo circulated to all civil servants instructing them to vote "yes". Another newspaper which openly campaigned for a no vote was promptly banned.

Last Sunday night, hundreds of supporters of the Kifaya (Enough) democracy movement tried to occupy Midan Tahrir, Cairo's central square.

The activists were surrounded by security police after marching down one of the main boulevards. Many were arrested, while others were beaten up.

Egypt's judges – who have become a focus for opposition to the regime – have called for a "black day" of mourning. Kifaya has called on Egyptians to dress in black and stage peaceful protests and strikes across the country.

On Monday of this week some 3,000 people staged a sit-in in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria.

The Muslim Brotherhood won substantial representation in parliament in the 2005 elections. The MPs, who had to stand as independents, have become a vocal opposition to Mubarak's National Democratic Party.

MPs staged a walk out of parliament

last month after details emerged of an Israeli massacre of Egyptian prisoners during the 1967 war. The massacre was ordered by Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, who is now Israel's infrastructure minister. Mubarak has made an alliance with Israel central to his foreign policy.

The constitutional changes would allow the security forces to silence Egyptian bloggers, one of the main sources of information on the dictatorship. The government has moved to close down 21 websites that have criticised the regime or exposed torture.

A blogger who criticised the president was sentenced to four years in prison last month, while security forces have repeatedly attacked demonstrations – including a protest by poor people demanding compensation after they lost their homes in a fire.

As riot police tore into groups of demonstrators, US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice was in Egypt to rally "Arab moderates" – dictatorships such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – into an alliance against Iran.

The changes come after a rash of successful wildcat strikes by tens of thousands of workers, and peasant rebellions over attempts to seize their land.

All this comes as delegates from the international anti-war movement were set to arrive in Egypt for this weekend's Cairo Conference against imperialism.

Bloggers' eyewitness reports

The renowned Egyptian blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy published an eyewitness report on the protests

'Downtown Cairo has come under occupation once again by Mubarak's troops, plainclothes state security agents and battalions of plainclothes thugs which the interior ministry uses to "keep law and order".

As groups started to assemble in Tahrir Square, police agents moved immediately to encircle them and push them away. They tried to convince the protesters to move to the Press Syndicate building.

We started moving in a group towards Talaat Harb Square, where we heard security wasn't as heavily present. We moved slowly, pushed by security, thugs and soldiers.

There was a horrible pushing match back and forth. One of the plainclothes thugs kicked blogger Salma Said in her stomach. Other activists were also kicked and punched.

I managed to escape around 6.30pm and received a call to say there were 200 demonstrators in front of the Press Syndicate, chanting slogans against Mubarak.

There are unconfirmed reports that activists were assaulted by the police inside the building.

For updates go to www.arabist.net/arabawy

To read Joel Beinin and Hossam el-Hamalawy's account of the Egyptian strike wave, go to www.merip.org/mero/mero032507.html

Fight for change in Sierra Leone

By Ibrahim Tamba Fanday

The commemoration of the end of the slave trade in the British Empire should bring to mind the fate of Sierra Leone.

In 1787 British abolitionists and philanthropists established a settlement in Freetown for repatriated and rescued slaves.

Today Freetown is the capital of Sierra Leone, a country rich in resources, but whose people live in extreme poverty. It is situated on the west coast of Africa and has a population of 4.5 million.

We suffered a brutal civil war from 1992 to 2002. Our diamond wealth was fought over by rich neighbouring states and international companies.

Life expectancy in Sierra Leone is 34 – the lowest in the world. Three quarters of the people live below the poverty line and some 65 percent of the adult population are illiterate.

Seven years ago there was a British military intervention in Sierra Leone to support president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. This was widely hailed as being about "restoring democracy".

But Kabbah's party has continued to act in a thoroughly undemocratic way. It fixes elections and overrides the views of opponents even when they have won support in local areas.

Motive

The hidden motive for the British intervention seems to have been support for British mining companies operating in the country, such as the Sierra Leone Diamond Company, the Basama Mining Company and the Koidu Holding Company.

The operations of these companies have destroyed the livelihoods of people living in those areas. Their lands are taken from them forcefully and there is indiscriminate encroachment on sacred lands, regardless of the wishes of indigenous people.

Every day people complain to Britain's Department for International Development – but nothing happens.

The department won't change the situation because of what it hopes to derive from these companies' operations. There should be more pressure on them and the Sierra Leone government to improve the social situation.

Ibrahim Tamba Fanday is president of an association representing landowners affected by mining operations in Koidu, Kono District, Sierra Leone

Kidnapped by US forces

The capture by Iranian forces of 15 British sailors in the Gulf has led to warmongering headlines and threats against Iran from the British government.

But the flurry of violent rhetoric has ignored the fact that Iranian diplomats are still being held in occupied Iraq after being seized by US forces and by kidnapers wearing the uniforms of elite Iraqi army units. On the morning of 11 January, US troops stormed the Iranian consulate in Arbil in northern Iraq.

Using stun bombs, they disarmed the guards, then seized five officials: claiming later that they were members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Iraq's foreign minister stated that the Iranians had been working in Arbil with the approval of the government. The building where they were seized, he added, was a liaison office, set to become a full consulate.

In February gunmen wearing uniforms of the Iraqi 36th Commando Battalion seized a secretary of the Iranian embassy in Baghdad: a special Iraqi unit under US direction.

The kidnapping coincided with George Bush's allegations that Iran was directly involved in attacks on US forces in Iraq.

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Mugabe faces biggest challenge



Inflation is running at 1,700 percent

By Kevin Wingfield

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe is facing the most serious challenge to his 27-year rule. As Socialist Worker went to press the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions were set to hold mass stay-away strikes.

This follows strikes by teachers, doctors, nurses and civil servants.

Conditions in Zimbabwe are desperate. Inflation runs at 1,700 percent, three million people, two-thirds of the working age population, are reported to have left the country.

300,000 people are waiting for passports because there is no ink and paper to print them on. Unemployment is 75 percent and two-thirds of the population struggles to survive on a dollar a day or less.

Rhodesia (as Zimbabwe was called) was a British colony for a century before independence in 1979.

White settlers stole land from Zimbabwe's black people by violence and trickery and set up a society where the white four percent of the population had all the rights; all the votes; most of the land; and almost all the wealth. The black population was deprived of all rights.

By the 1970s the fight against white minority rule was led by a left wing influenced by Maoism and Stalinism. A guerrilla war involving around 40,000 rebels was fought across the countryside.

The national liberation movement failed to win a decisive victory, but Smith was forced to negotiate. A deal was brokered by Thatcher's foreign secretary Lord Carrington in 1979.

Key elements in the agreement guaranteed the 'rights' of the white farmers to maintain their landholdings and positions of political influence. Mugabe, who was portrayed as a 'Marxist' in the Western press, accepted the Lancaster House agreement and Zimbabwe became independent the next year.

The first years of independence also saw an upsurge of strike action, which pressurised the Mugabe government into implementing a number of radical reforms. These brought a big improvement in ordinary people's lives.

Between 1980 and 1985 infant and child deaths fell by about a half. Spending on education per head more than doubled between 1979 and 1990. Spending on primary education almost trebled.

But the socialist rhetoric did

not last long.

From the mid-1980s the international bankers were urging Mugabe to change policy. They wanted to see a sharp shift to market reforms and an end to all talk of socialism. In 1990 the country was opened up to the IMF and economic disaster followed.

With the white ranchers still holding all the best land, more and more was devoted to tobacco at the expense of maize production. During the 1990s the area given over to tobacco soared by 40 percent because growing this drug is 50 times more profitable than growing maize.

Subsidies were withdrawn from food, transport and other necessities and the standard of living of the mass of Zimbabweans plummeted as the white minority and the favoured, corrupt, few at the top of Zanu lived in luxury.

But while the hopes of millions were being betrayed British Prime minister Margaret Thatcher could say of Mugabe in 1985, 'he is a man who can be relied upon to provide stability and economic growth.'

From 1995 a series of mass struggles rocked Zimbabwe, threatening Mugabe and the interests of Western imperialism.

In order to cling onto power for himself and his cronies Mugabe, in a blaze of radical rhetoric, organised his favoured supporters to take over a number of white landholdings, which he had left untouched for twenty years.

But for most of Zimbabwe's population this brought them no benefit as repression was tightened and structural adjustments bit deeper.

Mugabe still uses the anti-imperialist rhetoric to divert attention from the failure of his regime. But it was his concessions to the white landowners and to neo-liberalism that laid the basis for Zimbabwe's present predicament.

Nationalist movements, even those led by radical figures who talk a sort of Marxism, if they do not challenge the basis of capitalism, end up doing a deal with imperialism and powerful big business interests.

Mugabe is now reduced to imprisoning and beating up his rivals, stealing elections and seeking political support from other African leaders with phoney 'anti-imperialist' talk. But the struggles of the desperate mass of Zimbabweans offer hope for a better future.

The big bus

Kieran Allen, sociologist at UCD, has written an important new book, T

What motivated you to write this book?

First of all, ever since the anti-World Trade Organisation protests at Seattle, there has been a lot of analysis of the destructive agenda of the big corporations. But up until now this has primarily concerned other countries, such as those of Latin America.

Yet these arguments apply very clearly in Ireland and I wanted to bring the approach of the international anti-capitalist movement to this country.

Secondly, on an individual level, where I work in UCD, it has become very clear that research that was once done for the public good has been totally changed. Academic work is now intellectual property and the whole ethos of the university sector is a commercial one.

When the young Karl Marx looked into a case that came before the courts of wood gatherers whose traditional access to firewood had been overturned by property owners, he gained an insight into the whole system of capitalism.

It was a bit like that for me, the specific, local, intrusions of the corporate agenda made me angry and also inspired the book.

The book details many instances of government giveaways to the multinationals, which did you find most shocking?

The most dramatic is Rosspoint. We were always told that Ireland has no natural resources, but it's clear that in recent years there have been some very significant finds.

The way in which the gas of Corrib has been given away is a scandal and it is no wonder that a World Bank report rated Ireland as one of the top seven countries that offered 'very favourable' terms for exploration. By contrast, George Bush's home state of Texas was rated 'tough.'

It is important to say it's not just Ray Burke, he is one of the villains of the piece in that he began the concessions, but very significantly Bertie Ahern played a major role in this: one of the chameleons behind the scene. As Minister for Finance, Ahern cut tax rates on profits from 50 percent to 25 percent and companies were given full ownership of the fields. cut the tax from 50 to 25. Even Burke thought this too generous.

When you read the public enquires, it's clear that Bertie Ahern played a major role in the handover of Ireland's resources to the multinationals.

The incidents you describe in the book suggest that democracy has been seriously undermined in recent years.

I think that socialists have always regarded democracy as limited; parliament is a front stage where genuine issues are debated but the state is not, in fact, under the control of the politicians.

A permanent elite exists in the form of the top civil servants. Outside of the state, boards of directors have been able to heavily affect policies. The achievement of democracy was a gain for workers, but the structures of capitalism limited what could be achieved through the conventional democratic process.

Because of globalisation, however, there has been a change to the relationship between corporations and national states. The corporations, despite their own rhetoric about freedom from interference, need to have a 'frictionless' relationship with the state.

In recent years they have attempted to make national states the direct servants of their immediate, not just strategic, needs. So enormous pressures have undermined the limited democracy that we had.

For example, the Waste Management



Act has taken certain powers, such as the levying or not of bin charges, the issue of building incinerators, etc, away from local councils to unelected city and county managers.

The 'frictionless' relationship of multinationals with the state emerges through relatively new mechanisms.

There has been a massive upsurge in lobbying by corporate bodies in Ireland; this is derived from US experience. PR companies set up a lobbying wing, typically recruited from key figures from the political elite to represent their interests.

The most dramatic example of this was the scrapping of a bill on alcoholism. The Dáil Committee recommended a ban on advertisements to youth, as did a national task force, Bertie Ahern even announced that this would be introduced in 2005.

But despite this democratic process the drinks industry hired MRPA Kinman as its lobbying agency. This is an organisation with PD connections. Ray Gordon, the managing director, was press officer with the PDs. Stephen O'Byrnes was a policy director. And the chairman of MRPA, Brian Geoghegan, is the husband of Mary Harney. They lobbied the Minister for Health, Mary Harney and eventually succeed in getting the bill scrapped.

If you were to write a novel you couldn't get away with such a crude, di-

rect, portrayal of how corporations can undermine government decisions. In fact, Ireland is marketed as a place where lobbyist can pick up a phone get on to ministers and make progress for their client.

You also point out that the growing role for unelected state bodies also has affected the ability of people to shape decision-making.

This strategy derives from the right-wing economist, Hayek. He argued for the 'depoliticisation of society', to take away decision making away from those who are elected in favour of agencies outside of democratic control, bodies such as the HSE, the NRA and the EPA.

When you look at who is on the boards of these bodies, it's clear that they are heavily drawn from big business. So HSE's board includes the managing director of Microsoft Ireland.

Take, for example, the decision to have private hospitals on public grounds. What's absolutely shocking about that is that there is no green paper, nor any research looking for input by various interest groups, in other words the traditional method of government has been abandoned.

The fact that the HSE are preparing the way for private medicine is clear from their sponsoring first private health con-

For more news, comment and analysis, visit the Socialist Worker webpage www.swp.ie

Business grab

The Corporate Takeover of Ireland. He talked to Socialist Worker about it.



ing it by worst services in Europe, for example, the MRSA superbug in the hospitals, or the lack of screenings for breast cancer.

Thirdly, if you cut taxes on the wealthy, you have to get indirect taxes, such as VAT, or stealth taxes like bin charges. These are regressive taxes; they hit the poor more than the wealthy. One economist has shown indirect taxes cost lowest earners some 20 percent their income, whereas they cost those at the top only 10 percent.

How would what is happening in Education, say, illustrate the theme of your book?

Education used to be regarded as a public good, available to all equally and not a source of profit making for business. Now the school building programme is being handed over under Public Private Partnership (PPP) schemes.

The company builds the school, runs it, hires the non-teaching staff and for 20 years gets to draw a levy. This system limits extra curricular activities. It means the corporation has to be consulted all the time, say if the school wants to change computer software.

Also, commercial advertising in school has undermined the old ethos of education being a public good. There is the AIB bank challenge, for example, where schools starved of funds get sponsorship in return for the bank getting space, with students to act as bank managers and try to obtain customers from their classmates.

It is disgraceful how they've been let into schools. The former Minister of Education, Noel Dempsey, personally endorsed a sponsorship scheme by Independent Newspapers while he held office.

Is there a danger that people will read your book, look upon the power of the corporations and despair?

It's important that we face up to reality. I think what's going on is shocking. It doesn't follow, though, that they are all powerful.

In fact the situation is one in which you can see several weaknesses on their part. In the past the corporate elite built around them support from the respectable middle class. Whole layers of society looked up to the corporate elite as a means of social advance.

But the whole aim of recent trends has alienated this support. Neo-liberalism is gung-ho capitalism, it accepts no hostages. It therefore is and appears to be, too extreme, and this generates discontent right across the social spectrum.

At the moment there is no developed set of ideas to counter those of the neo-liberals, but the legitimacy of the ruling elite is being undermined by their adoption of this programme.

The very fact that the corporations have to use more undemocratic methods is testimony to the fact that they are losing hegemony over society. The left has, therefore, to break out of small defensive propaganda groups and lead people who want to fight, regardless of the fact that the wider public does not embrace socialist ideas.

Hence need for revolutionaries to be in broader movements like People Before Profit and Respect, to give expression to the opposition to the corporations. Within these movements there is also the need for a party working towards overthrow of capitalism.

We need to work with people who often start campaigning in a less than confident fashion, but once they feel some power, they come to understand they can win. Once that realisation spreads, it creates more favourable terrain for the revolutionary argument that we have to get of capitalism lock, stock and barrel.

ference.

The HSE operates like a corporation, its model is private medicine. Even though the US, the most privatised medical system, spends twice as much on health care as France or the UK, for a worse service.

Supporters of Ireland's low tax regime argue that it has to its credit the success of the Celtic Tiger, but you draw attention to the problems with this.

It is clear that Ireland is an international tax haven; Microsoft and Google, for example, make great savings in payments to the US government through their operations in Ireland. The system is set up on that basis.

But there are three major issues that arise. Firstly, Ireland has contributed to a race to the bottom as far as taxes on profits go. Ireland's low tax policy gave the country an initial lead and made it attractive to the major corporations, but this has triggered a battle, with corporation taxes falling across Europe and Cyprus in fact becoming even more favourable to the multinationals.

Secondly, there may have been some crumbs for the country during the boom, but we are now going back to pre-Tiger growth rates. How, therefore, are services going to be funded? People are subsidis-

COMMENT

It's time to legislate for abortion on medical grounds in Ireland

Dr. Juliet Bressan

Abortion is legally available on request in most European countries, but in Poland it is only legally allowable to save a woman's life or to preserve her health.

This is quite similar to the situation in Ireland, although in Ireland there is no actual legislation written, and the only guideline we have to go by is the historic X case, in which the Supreme Court allowed an abortion for a minor because of a risk of suicide.

So, a woman has no legal right to an abortion, and a doctor no right to provide one.

Abortion was legally available on request in Poland until the end of communism. But, the last Pope, John Paul II, offered to support Poland's campaign for accession to the EU, on condition that the Polish government banned abortion. Polish women now travel in their tens of thousands to other EU countries to access abortion, mainly to Holland and Germany.

Campaign

Currently, anti-abortion politicians in Poland are stepping up their campaign to ban abortion completely.

The Prime Minister, Jaroslaw Kaczynski announced on 21 March that he is promoting a constitutional amendment to 'protect unborn children', an amendment recently proposed by his brother Lech Kaczynski, who is the president of Poland.

One Polish woman has recently led a dramatic challenge to the conservative trend.

She sued the Polish government at the European Court of Human rights and won her case and the ruling that the Polish government had failed her right to protect her own health in the case of unwanted pregnancy.

Alicia Tysi c is a single mother of three, who was at risk of losing her eyesight as a result of repeated pregnancies.

In 2000, she delivered by caesarian section, and as a result her eyesight was lost and she is now severely disabled.

Her gynaecologist had refused her an abortion, and now the Polish government must pay Tysi c 25,000 euros in compensation and 14,000 euros to refund the costs of the proceedings.

Alicia Tysi c had tried to prosecute the gynaecologist in Poland, but the Prosecutor refused the case saying that there was no direct relation between her loss of sight and the doctor's decision.

Ruling

The European Court of Human Rights, however, while not ruling on the right to an abortion or to the Polish abortion law, ruled that the Polish government had failed the woman's right to a private life.

After the Strasbourg ruling, Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Roman Giertych said he would immediately demand an appeal, to protect 'the right to life for the unborn.'

Jurek said he hoped the League of Polish Families (LPR), a junior coalition partner, would join the work on the president's proposal.

All of this sounds very familiar to us in Ireland: the pro-life amendment campaign of the '80s, the 'Society for Protection of the Unborn Child', 'Youth Defence' and 'Family Solidarity' were all fronts for a widespread right-wing Catholic campaign to ban abortion.

They were organizations whose activities resulted in censorship of literature and libraries, young women being prevented from leaving the country, the closure and burning down of family planning offices and student health groups.

Today, there are ongoing pro-choice campaigns being run by Labour Youth, and the Safe and Legal In Ireland (www.safeandlegalinireland.com) group, and many more, to undo the damage that the original 'pro-life' clause had placed in the constitution.

So, it's d ja vu in Poland at the moment, although, so far debate has not agreed any wording for the proposed anti-choice amendment, and there is strong opposition from the Democratic Left Alliance.

'An amendment to article 30 of the constitution would result in a dramatic deterioration of the situation of women,' said Jerzy Szmajdzinski, leader of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD).

The ruling of the European Court has serious implications for Ireland. As Doctors for Choice put it.

'Irish doctors and patients face a similar situation here, as there is no legal framework that guarantees the right to an abortion in the case of risk to life and/or health.'

'The judgments following the X and C cases imply the legality of abortion in cases of maternal risk, but legislation has never been written.'

'We encourage women to vindicate their rights at the European Court of Human Rights in the hope that a similar judgment will be found against the Irish State for its inaction on this serious clinical issue which affects thousands of patients.'



Kieran Allen's 'The Corporate Takeover of Ireland' is published by the Irish Academic Press at €17.50. Order a copy from Bookmarx, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8

Revolt that spelt the end for slavery

By David Gaughran

This month marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade by the British Empire.

The 1807 act of parliament made it illegal to transport slaves in British ships. A Tory MP, William Wilberforce, is remembered as the man who abolished slavery.

The main role, however, in the battle against slavery fell to far more radical movements and figures. Two such figures were Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, leaders of the San Domingue revolution, one of the most important slave revolts ever to have taken place.

In 1791 the slaves of San Domingue (now called Haiti) rose in revolt. The story is an extraordinary one, at the heart of which lies the fact that the slaves had two choices: 'Victory or Death'.

The saga of the revolt is vividly captured in C. L. R. James's masterpiece, 'The Black Jacobins'.

Haiti is now the poorest country in the world; in 1789, however, it was one of the world's richest, producing coffee, sugar, indigo and cotton, and making up the majority of France's gross national produce.

The island was divided up between the French in west (St Domingue) and the Spanish in the East (Santo Domingo). There were 30,000 whites in St Domingue, 40,000 mulattos (mixed race) and approximately half a million black slaves.

This vast wealth was dependant on slaves. Slaves were taken from Africa, loaded onto ships, packed into galleries and transported across the Atlantic. Shipboard revolts were common, which meant that the crews of the ships greatly feared their cargo.

'One Captain, to strike terror into the rest, killed a slave and divided heart, liver and entrails into 300 pieces made each of the slaves eat one.' Incidents like this were not rare.

In St Domingue the slaves worked the land. They received no education. Living and working in close proximity to each other they were like a modern-day proletariat.

The entire system was held together by sadistic terror. Slaves received the harshest punishments for the slightest infractions. The whip was the most common punishment, but mutilations, burnings alive, being roasted on fires, being filled with gunpowder and blown up, were also common forms of terror used against slaves.

This all began to change with the French Revolution of 1789, which raised the hopes of slaves. Many of the people who were in the early revolutionary assembly, though, were rich merchants: while they hated the aristocracy they still profited from the slave trade.

In a compromise to their interests, the revolutionary French assembly extended French citizenship and thus freedom, only to those Mulattos who could show that their father and mother were born in France. This amounted to just 400 people.

Satisfying no one and ignoring the slaves entirely, the failure of the assembly to emancipate slaves led to the great revolt of 14 August 1791.

The immediate aim of the risen slaves was the extermination of their masters. Lacking any education and being filled with rage they struck out with the only thing they had been taught. 'Vengeance!' was their slogan.

From their masters they had known rape, torture and humiliation of every type and they returned it in kind. But their orgy of destruction didn't last long. Very quickly they formed an organised mass movement.

The slaves traveled miles to hear the political news from the revolution and to make their plans. By the end of the year a huge slave army had been established under the command of Toussaint L'Ouverture.

Toussaint, the eldest of eight, belonged to a small privileged layer of slaves. He learned to read, write and draw at an early age. Later he became a coachman for his master.

He was already well known and respected among the slaves before the revolt. When the revolt initially broke out, he was cautious and held his fellow



Main picture: Contemporary illustration of slave trade; **above:** Slave revolt leader Toussaint L'Ouverture

The slaves traveled miles to hear the political news from the revolution and to make their plans

slaves back from joining in.

Soon though, realising that the revolt was spreading like wild fire, Toussaint committed himself to joining the slave camps. Very quickly he began to gain an army of his own, training the brightest and sharpest of the risen slaves in guerrilla warfare tactics.

Toussaint rose through the ranks of the slave army very quickly becoming a leading military commander. One of Toussaint's principle lieutenants was a man called Jean-Jacques Dessalines.

Dessalines was born into a life of slavery. He worked on a plantation until he was about 30 years old and was then bought by a free black man named Dessalines who treated him kindly. He then adopted the name of his new master.

In 1791 Dessalines joined the rebellion and it was in the slave army that he first met Toussaint. Initially they brought the slave army over to the side of the Spanish who gave them arms: in the mistaken hope that the slave revolt might help Spain gain the colony from France.

The entire island was now in a state of war. The British saw this and thought they could take advantage of the situation. If they could take and hold San Domingue they would once more be a power in the region.

Had Britain succeeded, 'instead of being abolitionists they would have been the most powerful practitioners and advocates of the slave-trade.' The British sent an expedition of 7,000 men to St Domingue, the first of an army that would eventually reach 80,000. Back in Westminster, talk of the abolition of slavery was suddenly off the agenda.

Toussaint was at this time a Spanish officer and therefore an ally of the British forces. But he saw his dreams of a slave-free San Domingo being destroyed by the British. The fact that events were changing fast in France offered him a new political direction.

In France as long as the Girondins were in power nothing would be done about slavery. Under pressure from the threat of invasion and counter-revolution, however, the Girondins could not last: they would not fix maximum food prices; they would not abolish feudal dues; and they would not ratify the sei-

zure of land by the peasants.

The Paris masses responded to the crisis. They rose up and placed the Girondins under house arrest, bringing to power a radical Jacobin government.

The following meeting of the French convention voted that slavery, the 'aristocracy of the skin', should immediately be brought to an end.

As soon as news of the French convention's emancipatory decision reached Toussaint he changed sides, relieving the Spanish of their supplies and ammunition. Toussaint was now an officer in the revolutionary French army in command of some 5,000 men holding a line of fortifications in two provinces.

Toussaint, Dessalines and his men inflicted on the British one of the severest defeats they have ever suffered. 40,000 British soldiers lost their lives in St Domingue. They were driven from the island in 1796 never to return.

But by now the Jacobins had been defeated in France and the new rulers were in the process of rolling back the revolutionary tide. They implemented a policy of divide and rule to get the island back in to the hands of the planters.

They bribed the mulatto generals to fight against Toussaint, starting a vicious civil war. Dessalines responded with a bloody purge in the south of the island that made reconciliation with the mulattos impossible.

At the end of the war Toussaint emerged victorious and marching into the Spanish half of the island, conquered it. Toussaint, now in command of the entire island, made himself Governor-General for life with absolute powers.

But politically, Toussaint was in difficulty. He wanted to restore the island's plantation economy, albeit with free labour, not slaves. He therefore sought to appease the old white ruling elite and convince Napoleon Bonaparte, the new ruler of France, of his loyalty.

The alternative, to declare independence and abandon the plantations in favour of a small farm economy, was unpalatable to Toussaint, who with great humanitarianism had tried to protect the white population and encourage them to assist in the development of the island's culture.

Bonaparte, however, understood that Toussaint was an irreconcilable obstacle

to the restoration of slavery and the return of immense profits for the empire from the island. He sent the largest expedition to ever sail from France to crush the rebellious slaves.

In the war with France, Toussaint was initially handicapped by his reluctance to see his dreams for the island shattered. But the white elite, who had been treated so carefully by Toussaint, abandoned him, rejoicing at the prospect of restoration and began killing former slaves in their thousands.

On the 7 June 1802 the French generals offered Toussaint a treaty if he would come in person and discuss it. He did so, was captured, and died in a freezing French jail.

Fortunately for the slaves, Dessalines was still at liberty having fought the French to a standstill. Less politically sophisticated than Toussaint, Dessalines nevertheless grasped the necessity to break from France and indeed, every imperial country, by declaring the island independent.

To outward appearances Dessalines waged a race war, but the real content of the struggle was class. With Toussaint betrayed by the white plantation owners and the French, the issue was all or nothing: either slavery would return to the island or the old ruling class would be driven out entirely.

The black generals had an army willing to throw themselves in front of cannons for the sake of victory against slavery. They fought a brilliant war of manoeuvre to hold the French soldiers and plantation forces at bay, defiantly singing the Marsielle, reclaiming the song's revolutionary spirit from the French soldiers who listened in amazement and dismay.

On the 4th of December 1803 Napoleon Bonaparte surrendered France's last remaining territory to Dessalines slave army, ending the revolt. St Domingue renamed itself Haiti and declared itself independent from France in 1804.

This is a great story that has remained hidden from conventional history. Before 'The Black Jacobins' was published historians tended to focus on the rise of humanitarianism and its role in ending slavery. C. L. R. James changed this by showing that the slaves themselves were central to their own liberation.

Theatre of War

By Paul O'Brien

The events surrounding the Iraq war have revitalised the political play. Recent productions of David Hare's *Stuff Happens*, Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists*, Tim Robbins's *Embedded*, or My name is Rachel Corrie indicate a revival in the confidence and focus of political theatre that was damaged and disorientated by the retreat from politics of the last twenty years.

In addition, the revival of anti-war plays from World War I is no accident and reminds us that the 'old wars are our wars, the old issues are our issues', even if they are decked out in hobble skirts and old uniforms.

A political interpretation of drama, in the past confined to the margins of Marxist literary theory, is now accepted as part of the mainstream theatre in both theory and practice. Today, the literature of politics is everywhere in drama. Writers and audiences have been stirred up at every level in the theatre.

In the absence of debate, theatre can become a force involved with history, by addressing a culture that has not yet come in to existence in political terms.

When William Butler Yeats set up the Irish National Theatre in 1904 he believed that it should also be a forum for debate; that it could substitute for the limitations of journalism.

The failure of journalism in the Iraq war has made the embedded journalist a co-conspirator in subverting the concept of war as a 'tragedy' for all concerned.

'Tragedy' is not a definition that is straightforward: It is both a descriptive and a theatrical term that conveys an image of war as a mutually destructive process.

Embedded journalism takes the historical and political roots of the conflict out of context and reduces it to a series of senseless acts of terror. Documentary drama has had to substitute for this failure.

David Hare is one of many dramatists who have felt impelled to utilise this format because of the disregard for human life, and the wishes of the majority who opposed the war in Iraq.

He writes, 'all over the world this year, we are seeing the same phenomenon of electorates waiting, bewildered or furious for their own leaders to catch up with them, and trying to understand the mystery of their refusal.'

Documentary drama is no substitute for real drama, it simply substitutes for real journalism.

The theatre critic, Helen Meaney, in response to this development said that 'remembrance is not art', theatre must transform reality into something else: it must have a dramatic content.

Political issues should not be confined to verbatim recreations but must also contain dramatic interpretations.

Much of the new documentary theatre has been concerned with the age-old ambivalence of humanity towards war and dramatises society's love affair with violence even as it exposes this often-fatal relationship.

In the past, playwrights such as Sean O'Casey wrote of war and its horrors, but also of the poverty and inequality that deforms human life and is as destructive as war itself.

In his work they are inextricably linked as, in the early twenty-first century, we can see terrorism and poverty are similarly interrelated.

O'Casey's reputation has been in decline for many years, but recent productions that emphasise the politics have given new life to his work.

Ben Barnes, who directed the *Plough and the Stars* at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 2002, when asked about its relevance for today said: 'this is an anti-war play, and the world is obsessed about whether or not there will be a war in Iraq and the consequences for the Middle East.'

It set me thinking about the reception these documentary dramas might receive in Baghdad, Tel Aviv or the Gaza Strip.

They have much to say to the current generation who endure the suffering: the innocents caught in the crossfire in Palestine; the victims of a suicide bomb in Iraq or the victims of intolerance and sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

Their expression of faith in the innate courage and endurance of ordinary people would surely find a resonance among the beleaguered people of the Middle East.

CINEMA

'Heroes' fight the doomed 'hordes' in Ancient Greece



Rumble in Sparta

By Eoin Dorman

During the course of our school years, or perhaps in idle research, most of us have come across the battle of Thermopylae; the famous last stand of 300 Spartans against the multitudinous Persian armies.

Most historical accounts will also note that there were several thousand soldiers representing many other Greek city-states, but the Spartans are certainly the most famous. A great concept for a film, we must agree, the last stand of a few hundred heroes against the hordes.

I thoroughly enjoyed the film as only an adrenaline-junkie can. Battle scene after battle scene followed by the slightest bit of political drama mercifully followed

by another battle scene keeps the audience on the edge of their seats throughout.

The film is also visually compelling, entirely filmed on blue screen to give it a feel that could only be described as legendary. 300 has a slightly otherworldly air, which fits with the sense of detachment that runs through it.

The Spartans go to war knowing that they are going to die, and the audience know it too. Everything the characters do has an air of dutiful futility, which is fascinating to watch.

Since '300' is adapted from a Frank Miller graphic novel, there are certain things that I went to the cinema expecting to see, and unfortunately I wasn't surprised.

Yes, the role of women in the film was mostly to be either prostitutes or the lovers of greater men. Yes, most of the villains were deformed in some way, and those who were deformed also ended up becoming villains. Yes, there were amounts of blood that could fill swimming pools.

Even more worrying are the racist undertones that undeniably pervade '300'. From the moment Leonidas deals with a Persian messenger by kicking him and his bodyguards into a deep pit we can see where the film is going.

Frank Miller doesn't do well with black heroes either, and 300 has none. The strong-willed Spartans, all of whom are white and built like tanks, fight against a

variety of ethnicities and creeds, from Africa to Asia.

Supposedly they are protecting their culture of reason and logic (not to forget subjecting imperfect children to exposure) against tyranny and mysticism. In today's context, the lines seem too easy to draw to be believed.

300 is entertaining, and if we don't look below the muscular surface it stays that way. It's worth watching as a piece of visual art, certainly, but don't rely on it for any heart-warming or touching moments, because what this film amounts to is a few hundred white guys beating up Johnny Foreigner, and all the great performances and special effects wizardry can't mask that.

CINEMA

The fight for female rights in Iran

By Dette McLoughlin

Offside is an Iranian film, made in 2004 by director Jafar Panahi. It has done the rounds in arthouse cinemas and film festivals around the country, and is now available on DVD.

It's a comedy and drama, a glimpse at the fight for female rights in Iran today.

The film is based around the real Soccer World Cup qualifier between Iran and Bahrain.

Filmed at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran during the game, it follows the adventure of a teenage Iranian girl who disguises herself as a boy to gain admission. Iranian females are legally banned from attending public soccer matches.

Our heroine's disguise is blown when she cannot allow the guards to frisk her body in their search for firecrackers. Soldiers take her to a detention pen situated just out of sight of the football pitch and away from male fans. There she has to wait during the whole match with other girls in the same predicament.

The girls in the pen have things in common, their passion for soccer, love of their national team and the resourcefulness to dress up as boys to get what they want. But otherwise they are very different.

Some are shy, quiet and

reserved. Others are streetwise, smoke, swear and confront their male guards. They argue on many issues to do with modern Iran:

Why aren't females allowed into the ground? Why can't girls chat to boys they are not related to, or even sit near them?

The soldiers try to answer these questions but cannot adequately do so. They have concerns of their own. How much longer will they have to serve in the army?

Can they get in touch with their girl friends without parents finding out? But why don't they have satisfactory answers to these girl's questions?

The story throws up hilarious situations, which serve to make the characters and the audience continually question the repressive laws and commonly held beliefs around gender, sex, and Iran.

It reveals that Iranian people are not some homogenous, Islamic fundamentalist mass, but they are much the same as people everywhere, even in the West. The youngsters wear international football shirts, some are disrespectful, some argue against the system, others don't.

As you are watching this clever film, it is chilling to think that the Bush administration has already pinpointed sites to bomb in Iran.



Questioning repressive laws and beliefs around gender and sex

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DUN LOAGHAIRE

SALLYNOGGIN

COUNCIL NEGLECT CONDEMNED

Richard Boyd Barrett and the People Before Profit Alliance have held a public meeting to discuss a series of issues that are causing great anger among local residents in Sallynoggin.

A huge number of residents are very angry that while there are three major private developments planned for the Dun Laoghaire Golf Club, Deerhunter site and Power City sites that pose a significant threat to Sallynoggin as a residential area, the needs of Sallynoggin as a community are being ignored and neglected.

The meeting discussed plans to start a major campaign for traffic calming and other road safety measures to be introduced in Sallynoggin, which has become a 'rat run' area because of traffic congestion spilling off nearby main roads.

The need for proper public consultation for the Sallynoggin, Glenageary and Monkstown Farm areas was stressed.



Richard Boyd Barrett, the People Before Profit candidate in Dun Laoghaire addresses a protest recently
Photo: Hugh Lewis

Richard Boyd Barrett said, 'there is incredible anger in Sallynoggin and nearby areas at the contempt they are being shown by the Council and developers.

'For years Sallynoggin has been neglected by the Council in terms of broken paths, lack of public amenities and poor traffic safety. Residents are completely ignored when they

complain about this to the Council or politicians.

'Now, greedy developers have decided they can make fortunes from huge developments in the area. If they go ahead, these

developments will have a massive and almost entirely negative impact on Sallynoggin and surrounding areas. Yet still, the views of local residents are completely ignored.

'The Council want to give the go-ahead to huge profit driven developments at the Golf Club, Power City and Deerhunter sites that will make the situation ten times worse, impact on other areas in Sallynoggin and still they ignore the local community.

'Of course, the pro-developer stance of the council and many politicians is causing chaos and anger in many parts of the County. Every community needs to get organised to stand up to the developers and Council arrogance.

'The protests we organised along with local residents before Christmas against the Power city development have knocked the developers back a bit but we need to keep up the battle.'

LOUGHLINSTOWN PARK.

People Before Profit Alliance and local residents campaign for lights

A campaign by local residents to get lights installed on the green area between the Loughlinstown Woods and Park and Cois Culainn estates has been launched by the People Before Profit Alliance.

People Before Profit activists and local residents have begun gathering a petition and are considering organising protests to demand the Council install the lights on the green area that links the two areas.

The campaign has been started because of safety fears among local residents having to cross the field between the two areas at night.

Currently there is a path across the field which is regularly used by local residents to go from one estate to the other but may residents are too frightened to cross the field at night in the pitch black.

Local parents are also concerned about not being able to keep an eye on children and young people who play there, once it gets dark.

The campaigners are also demanding resources for child and youth amenities for the many young people in the area.

Richard Boyd Barrett, who was approached by local residents to start

the campaign said, 'this is a simple and necessary request that local residents are making of the Council. This field is regularly used by local residents to cross from one estate to the other. It is also a play area for local children and young people.

'Putting lights in would probably also help with other problems in the area. The field has gained a reputation for anti-social behaviour and certainly there are a lot of young people hanging around there at night who have nothing to do.

'This is a bigger problem that needs to be dealt with by giving young people some decent facilities in the area, where they can go and have something to do but putting lights in the field would certainly help.

'The Loughlinstown area has suffered very seriously from council neglect. However, putting lights into green areas like this and providing resources for some decent facilities for children and teenagers would go a long way to sorting these problems out.

'I hope the Council will show as much interest in this important issue as they do helping property developers make huge fortunes.'

DUBLIN SOUTH EAST

People Before Profit in Dublin South East held three public meetings over the past fortnight across the Dublin South East constituency in Ringsend, Francis Street and Rathmines.

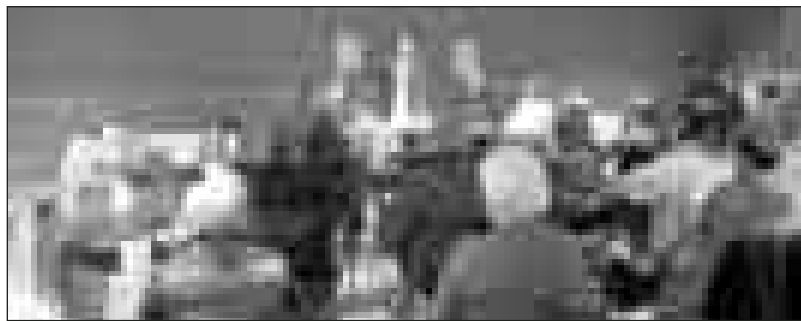
Speakers included Rory Hearne, People Before Profit Dublin South East candidate in the upcoming election; Jo Tully, a nurse at St James and public health campaigner; homelessness campaigner, Peter Mc Verry; Michael Punch, UCD Lecturer and housing campaigner; Rita Fagan, St. Michael's Estate Campaign and patients from St. Luke's

Cancer Hospital.

The overall theme of all the meetings was that the time has come for real change in Ireland.

With planning corruption, underfunding of the education system and the privatisation and neglect of the health service, there is a huge need for a real alternative to be built to challenge the big business, pro-privatisation parties of this country.

The planned Poolbeg Incinerator and the closure of St. Luke's Cancer Hospital were the main issues raised at the meetings. In Rath-



mines around 50 people came to discuss the issue of St. Luke's in particular and to build for the upcoming demonstrations outside

both McDowell's constituency office and the Dail.

The series of meetings have set the tone for a lively and exciting election

campaign, which is firmly rooted in community action in the area from the incinerator to the bin tax, and St. Luke's hospital campaign.

DUBLIN SOUTH CENTRAL

People Before Profit in Bulfin estate have started to campaign for basic resources for children in the area. Some time ago Tina McVeigh's eight-year-old son Luka was knocked down when out playing on the street.

His mother went to the council and asked for signs to slow down the traffic. Bulfin Road is regularly used as a short cut by rush hour drivers to avoid the gridlock in Kilmainham. Traffic speeds through the estate while the kids are playing.

The response of the Council to Tina was that there are no problems getting signs but she would have to pay €300 for one sign. Naturally like most working parents, Tina cannot afford to pay for signs for the road. Brid Smith, local People Before Profit candidate said, 'this is outrageous. What sort of a society are we living in that refuses to protect our children's safety unless the parents pay for it? Why do we have a city council if not to provide the basic facilities to allow us to function together?'

'We are going to demand that they provide signs and that parents like Tina are not forced to pay or made to feel guilty for not affording the cost. It would be an outrage if a child were seriously injured or worse and the Council

did not do their job in protecting the children.'

People Before Profit will be petitioning the area to insist that the council provide safety signs to slow down the traffic. Also the area has no playground and yet it is an estate populated by young families.

The area along the Grand Canal is undergoing refurbishment by the Council and People Before Profit are campaigning to get the Council to build a playground on some of the land that is lying unused.

ST. MICHAEL'S ESTATE CELEBRATES

The people of St Michael's estate in Inchicore recently celebrated the future and the past of this historically neglected area with a night of music, dance and fireworks. St. Michael's is due to get a complete face lift with new houses to be built along with a crèche, football pitches and many more facilities for local families.

This area was due to be wholly taken over for private housing and plans to redevelop the area without consultation with local groups and in the interests of developers were laid out.

But local community activists put a stop to the council's plans and engaged in a long determined campaign to improve the area in the interests of local people.

They succeeded to get some but not all of their demands. But without their vision, determination and struggle St. Michael's would have been sold off with no benefit to those who lived in hard conditions in the area for years.

Congratulations to the people of St. Michael's estate and no doubt they will have more struggles to face in the future. The local boys' school is due to close in September and parents will be forced to find alternative school places for them.



CHERRY ORCHARD REDEVELOPEMENT

Plans for the re-development of the Cherry Orchard area in Ballyfermot are moving ahead. Over 4,000 new housing units will be built. Unfortunately very few of these units will be allocated to public housing.

Waiting lists for housing in Ballyfermot will not be lessened. Some local people are very angry that their green spaces and parks are being taken over. Cherry Orchard park was rezoned to allow the council to build houses there but residents in Orchard Lawn who have objected to the planning are organising local protests.

They are unhappy with the process and the plans and don't believe there has been proper consultation.

Brid Smith of People Before Profit in Ballyfermot

said, 'there is definitely a need for housing in Ballyfermot but there needs to be plan of public housing. Affordable housing is often not affordable at all to those on the waiting lists and many of them are waiting for years for a home of their own.

'There are over 700 people waiting to be housed in Ballyfermot. It is also disgraceful that the developers are handed over public land and then allowed to make profit from the sale of houses. And there are more and more cases of parkland being taken by the Council for housing like Pearse Park in Crumlin.

'We need to protect our green spaces and we need a public housing programme not just giving our ground and spaces to the developers.'

Advert

No to Incineration
An Bord Pleanála Oral Hearing on
Poolbeg Incinerator
Thursday April 19th @ 12 noon
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MAY DAY PLANS

This year the Dublin Council of Trade Unions, in conjunction with the Youth Committee of the ICTU, are celebrating May Day with an afternoon festival on the theme of 'Global Day for Fair Pay'.

This year is the 100th Anniversary of the great 1907 strike in Belfast and DCTU wish to tie in with the celebrations of this event in that city, so their events will take place on Sunday 29th April, 2007, commencing at 1.00 p.m. with the traditional parade from Parnell Square.

This year is also the European Year for Equal Opportunities

and the organisers wish to once again focus on the new makeup of our population and workforce and to celebrate and include in 'May Day' our new workers and their positive addition to this Country.

A part of the day will therefore be a multi-cultural festival to be held in the Customs House area.

The parade will proceed to the Customs House where there will be some short speeches and music. From 2.00 p.m. there will be various stalls and attractions in the park beside the Customs House.

WATER CONFERENCE

In the light of attempted water privatisation in Northern Ireland and the disaster in Galway, readers of Socialist Worker will be interested in the conference organised by the Latin America Solidarity Campaign.

To promote greater awareness of the issue of who controls the world's water supply, the Dublin-based Latin America Solidarity Centre (www.lasc.ie) plans to host a week-long event, 'Thirsting For Justice: Defending the Global Water Commons' 15 - 21 April.

Speakers from Latin America will share their experiences of water privatisation, a trend set by the World Bank which has been met with popular resistance in countries such as Bolivia, Uruguay and Argentina in recent years.

CARROWMORE LAKE

Shell pollutes the water

By John Monaghan

Recent events at the proposed Bellanaboy gas refinery site in Mayo have once again highlighted the continuing pollution threat to the surrounding watercourses and Carrowmore Lake, the main drinking water supply for nearly ten thousand people.

Potential aluminium contamination of the lake (from site excavation and peat haulage) was identified in the summer of 2005, almost two full years ago, but has still not been resolved in spite of continued community efforts, and the installation of an expensive but experimental and problematic surface water treatment system at Bellanaboy.

Monitoring of the project has been carried out by a number of authorities and individuals as part of a 'Project Monitoring Committee' (PMC), set up to allow the development to comply with conditions set down by An Bord Pleanála.

This process has transparently failed and consistently failed in its task, allowing works to proceed with complete disregard to 'conditions', and worse, rubber-stamping the breaches and facilitating the slow and steady degradation of the local environment.



This is the mess that Shell inflicted

As things stand now: contaminated waters still discharge from Bellanaboy in excess of the pre-agreed limits, and have done so since monitoring began in November 2005.

The newly expanded 'Axonics' treatment system is producing water in excess of the same agreed limits.

Carrowmore Lake contains almost three-and-a-half times the aluminium levels compared to last year, and in excess

of the World Health Organisation limit for drinking water.

And recent Health Service Executive testing on the region's tap water has revealed aluminium levels on occasion far in excess of the same limit.

Mayo County Council, as the responsible body and steering hand on the PMC, officially regard the drinking water breaches as completely unrelated to Shell's works at Bellanaboy, even though they admit the cause has

not yet been identified beyond a possible 'blip' at Erris Waterworks treatment plant.

The local authority also denied recent diesel spillages leaving the refinery site, and along with the North Western Regional Fisheries Board refused to take samples when requested by the local community.

The threat to Carrowmore Lake (a Special Area of Conservation) has been identified since the Bellanaboy option was first

proposed, and forms a central part of An Taisce's objection to the EPA over Shell's IPPC licence currently under consideration by the Agency.

The latest shenanigans at Bellanaboy show how serious a threat the location is to Carrowmore Lake, and how this will only get worse if further peat-haulage is undertaken in the absence of intervention by the responsible authorities.

John Monaghan is a freelance writer based in Rossport

AOSDÁNA

Artists debate Israel boycott

At its Annual General Assembly in the Irish Museum of Modern Art (28 March 2007) the Irish state-sponsored academy of artists Aosdána debated two motions concerning Palestine presented by Margaretta D'Arcy, playwright and veteran political activist, and the composer Raymond Deane, who was a founding-member and former chairperson of the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

The first motion called for Aosdána to 'back the call from Palestinian Filmmakers, Artists and Cultural Workers to end all cooperation with state-sponsored Israeli cultural events and institutions', and was defeated after a lengthy and sometimes acrimonious discussion.

The second mentioned the Palestinian call and encouraged 'Irish artists and cultural institutions to reflect deeply before engaging in any

cooperation [with Israeli cultural events and institutions]'. This motion was passed.

While this is a mild resolution that leaves everything to the conscience of the individual artist and arts administrator, it should be remembered that Aosdána is a highly conservative institution that tries to steer clear of politics. This motion should be seen as a small step in the right direction.

One participant noted the irony of the position held by some of the Aosdána members who accused the proponents of the boycott of 'censorship'. 'Back in 1993 the same figures had opposed a motion successfully proposed by painter Robert Ballagh calling for the repeal of Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act which, it will be recalled, muzzled Sinn Féin spokespersons. Clearly their opposition to censorship is selective.'

Have you got a story for Socialist Worker?
Send it to editor@swp.ie
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KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Unfair Dismissal in Northern Ireland

By John Kavanagh

In Northern Ireland the definition of unfair dismissal is when you are dismissed from your job and your employer doesn't have a valid reason for dismissing you and/or the employer has acted unreasonably.

Dismissal is when your employer, with or without notice, ends your employment. It can also happen when a fixed-term contract isn't renewed or when an employer forces someone to retire. Dismissal can be done verbally or in writing.

Constructive dismissal is where your employer's actions (eg: extreme bullying) force you to resign.

If you are an employee and feel your employer has dismissed you unfairly, you can make an unfair dismissal claim to an Employment Tribunal. In most cases you will need to have one year's service to make a claim for unfair

dismissal.

It will be up to you to show that you have been dismissed. This will usually be clear but may be more difficult if you are claiming that you have been constructively dismissed.

Your employer must show they have:

- a valid reason for dismissing you.
- acted reasonably in the circumstances.

They need to have investigated the situation adequately and followed at least the steps in the statutory minimum dismissal procedure. If they don't follow the minimum procedure, your dismissal is usually automatically unfair.

If your employer has investigated fairly but come to the wrong conclusion (for example, if they have got the facts wrong), this will not necessarily mean the dismissal is unfair.

Your employer must

be able to show that they've been consistent and have not sacked you for doing something that they normally let other employees do. You may be able to claim unfair dismissal if you can show that you weren't told about a relevant company rule or policy by your employer.

Wrongful dismissal is different from unfair dismissal. It's where your employer breaches your contract in dismissing you, normally by dismissing you without notice or without following a procedure required by your contract. A dismissal can be both wrongful and unfair.

Some reasons for dismissal are automatically unfair, including:

- because you have become pregnant.
- because you have exercised or attempted to exercise a statutory employment right eg: taking parental leave or

your right to the national minimum wage.

- because of your membership of a trade union.

If you have been dismissed for any of these reasons you do not need the normal one year's service to take a case to an Employment Tribunal.

In the case of dismissal due to trade union activities or membership you can apply to an Employment Tribunal for "Interim Relief". If the tribunal considers it likely that at the full hearing it will uphold the complaint, the tribunal will either order reinstatement or re-engagement or will make an order for the temporary continuation of the contract of employment.

Interim Relief only applies in Northern Ireland there is no such provision in the Republic.

A dismissal is 'potentially fair' if it's because of:

- your conduct.
- your ability to do the job.
- redundancy.
- retirement.
- a legal reason that prevents you from doing your job, eg: losing your driving licence if you're a delivery driver.

If you've been employed for a year (or you're pregnant or on maternity or adoption leave), you have the right to a written statement of reasons for your dismissal if you ask. The article on reasons for dismissal can tell you the sort of steps your employer should follow to be able to show that they have acted reasonably.

If you feel you have been unfairly dismissed, you should appeal in the first instance, under your employer's dismissal or disciplinary procedures, or, in the case of discrimination or potential constructive dismissal,

making a complaint under their grievance procedure. Your shop steward or union representative should be involved at this stage of the process.

If you haven't been able to sort things out directly with your employer, you may need to go to an Employment Tribunal. Before doing so, you should have appealed under your company's dismissal or grievance procedure.

You must make the claim within three months of being dismissed unless these procedures have not been exhausted. As with all employment rights and industrial relations matters, it is advisable to seek the assistance of your trade union, although trade union membership is not compulsory in order to take a case to an Employment Tribunal.

If a tribunal finds in your favour, you could get your job back or

compensation. You needn't take your job back, but your compensation may be lower if you don't. Compensation is intended to put you where you would have been financially if you hadn't been sacked: there's no compensation for hurt feelings.

You'll be expected to minimise any financial loss by signing on, or looking for new work. A tribunal may reduce your compensation if it decides that your conduct played a part in your dismissal, or if you haven't complied with the statutory minimum disciplinary procedures.

The last thing any worker wants is to find themselves dismissed whether "fairly" or "unfairly" and therefore the best way of protecting yourself in work and of upholding all your employment rights is by organising yourself and your workmates into a trade union.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

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

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

REVOLUTION

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

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

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

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

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

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

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

working class.

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

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

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

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

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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

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

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

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

Join the Socialists

Fill in the form and send to

SWP PO Box 1648 Dublin 8

Name.....

Address.....

Email.....

Phone.....



Water Charges: Withdrawn for 2007/8



Photo: J.Carax/Indymedia.ie

NOW SCRAP THEM ALTOGETHER

By Eamonn McCann

The main reason for relatively low turn-outs at the water charges rallies on 31 March was that most people believed that the issue was about to be dealt with by the Assembly, and that there was no need now for a non-payment campaign.

About 500 people assembled in Belfast, 250 in Derry and 200 in Strabane.

The main political parties and the media had spread the idea that water charges had been abandoned at least until

April 2008, and that the Assembly would be working in the meantime on ways to scrap them altogether.

In fact, water charges haven't been abandoned.

What's happened is that the bills for 2007/2008 will be picked up by the British Treasury.

The money will be handed over to the Government-owned private company, Northern Ireland Water (NIW), which took over from the Water Service on 1 April.

Full-blown privatisation is set for

three years time, when, it is intended, NIW will be floated on the London stock exchange.

The function of water charges is precisely to provide a revenue flow for the privatised company.

A letter sent by Water Service boss Katharine Bryan on 23 March should have removed any doubt that this neo-liberal plan was going ahead.

The letter urged senior staff not to be confused by press reports suggesting that a new Assembly would change their course.

'Northern Ireland Water will still be established, as planned, on 1 April. NIW will be a government company outside of the Northern Ireland Civil Service... Planned changes in how we are regulated both economically and environmentally will continue.'

Ominously, neither Sinn Fein nor the DUP has commented on, much less denounced, Ms. Bryan's unconcealed contempt for the mandate they were given to ditch the water 'reforms.'

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