

Will Ireland follow France and reject the EU treaty?



By KIERAN ALLEN

THE FRENCH NO vote in 2005 terrified the rulers across Europe and now they wait anxiously on the Irish vote. Party leaders Bertie Ahern, Enda Kenny, Eamonn Gilmore and John Gormley have assured them that everything will be alright on the day.

But if the lessons of the French referendum are quickly learnt there could be another resounding NO.

The first is that the way to win is to fight from the left. Irish debates on the EU have focussed for too long on 'national sovereignty' and defending De Valera's constitution of 1937. The No campaign should not try to re-take that rhetoric.

Instead over the next few months, the campaign needs to go to postal workers to show how the EU postal directive will affect their jobs. It should remind the families of Aer Lingus workers how the EU was used to privatise the national airline. It should alert everyone to the dangers posed to public services by the philosophy of a 'free, undistorted market'.

It should mobilise the anti-war movement to oppose the EU battle groups and not to be taken in by talk of 'humanitarian missions' which are a cover for power grabs.

By tapping into this enormous well of resentment and resistance, a powerful movement can be built to challenge the elite.

The zone of conflict

While Ireland was enjoying its comparatively short Celtic Tiger boom and politicians claimed 'we' played the globalisation game and won, Europe shifted from a zone of consensus to one of instability.

Using the rhetoric about globalisation and competitiveness, the EU elite argued for the dismantling the welfare state. They tried reduce the share of the economy going to wages and social security and increase profits, CEO salaries and dividends.

European workers have been resisting in their millions. There have been enormous general strikes in France, Spain,

Greece, Italy and Portugal. The French NO vote on the constitution came out of this tremendous spirit of resistance.

The opportunity to vote NO has been now been handed on to Irish workers and it comes at an important time.

Fianna Fail won the last general election because many hoped that their victory would prolong the Celtic Tiger boom. The Labour Party made it easier by giving up on any critique of right wing economic policies and rowing in behind Fine Gael. But today the illusions about the economy are fading.

The Celtic Tiger boom has ended and the Irish are being pulled back into the European maelstrom where a real battle is being fought out between those who want a 'social Europe' that puts people before profit or a neo-liberal Europe which wants more 'flexibility' 'competitiveness' and a strong military super-state.

Organising to win

The French NO vote was won through a major social movement that tapped into the real concerns of millions.

Unity committees were established from below and were open to all on an individual basis, as opposed to structures based on organisational affiliation. They had a fluid organisational character which was referred to as a 'human chain'. Virtually all groups who were opposed to neo-liberalism participated. In early march, 150 such unity committees were set up. By mid-April, there were 500. When the referendum came at the end of May, there were 1,000 across France. They became a core of a much wider word of mouth phenomenon that carried the argument against the Treaty.

Here is how one writer described how the No vote was won in his area:

In the 20th arrondissement (district) of Paris, the call to form a unity committee was launched by a local Committee to Defend Public Services, itself set up on the back of the 2003 strikes against Raffarin's pension reforms. All the currents of the anti-neoliberal left participated in the group, but around a quarter of its 200 members were new to politics.

A core of around 50 activists attended

the committee's weekly meetings for three to four months, discussing the issues thrown up by the campaign before organising their activities for the week ahead. The committee drew up six or seven different leaflets during the campaign, and distributed 40,000 copies of them in the local area.

Ireland is much smaller than France, so it is unlikely that fifty people will gather in unity committees once a week. The record of social struggle is also far lower. But the method is the key to victory.

We need a NO campaign that is open to all who want to fight a Treaty that brings neo-liberalism and war. Such a campaign should have nothing to do with fanatics who worry about abortion or homosexuality and want to defend holy Ireland.

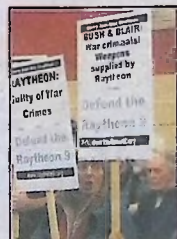
It should involve organised socialists and individuals with no affiliation. It should bring in trade union branches and anti-war groups. Above all else, it should be built from the bottom up, by the initiatives by the many hundreds activists who have emerged in Ireland in recent years.



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EDITORIAL

The death of the Celtic Tiger: The end of social peace.

The Irish economic miracle has finally come to a close. For more than a decade, Ireland was presented as a success story for neo-liberalism because it appeared to grow and grow. The hard-line US commentator, for example, Thomas Friedman, once wrote an article where he claimed that the 'leaping leprechaun' showed the rest of the world why de-regulation and cutting taxes on business was the way forward.

Now, however, the chickens are coming home to roost. For the past five years, the boom was prolonged by an artificial housing market which was fuelled by heavy lending by the banks. A tight circle of builders, land speculators and bankers made a fortune while tens of thousands of working people were saddled with huge debts. The housing crash will throw many building workers out of work and bring huge anxiety to those with large mortgages.

The difficulties are compounded by a determination on the part of employers to keep pay rises as low as possible.

The same rich elite who made a fortune during the boom now want workers to take a pay cut. Ireland is currently experiencing a rate of inflation of 5 percent but workers are only getting a 2.5 percent pay rise.

Tragically, the union leaders who sometimes talk eloquently about the inequalities have said nothing about catch-up claims for their members.

The real price of social partnership stands revealed – a union movement that keeps quiet when its own members are told to accept pay cuts.

We need a strong socialist movement to start changing all this and the Socialist Workers Party would, therefore, like to appeal to you to get involved. In 2008, there are a number of things we want to focus on. **We want to, firstly, see Bertie Ahern driven out of office.**

This corrupt leader of Fianna Fail has been received vast sums of money from big business.

He comes up with the most bizarre explanations which have only one thing in common – there is never a paper trial or any supporting evidence.

We can drive Ahern out of office by putting the Green Party and independents like Finian McGrath under huge pressure to withdraw support.

These hypocritical politicians won votes by posing left – now they must be told that it is unacceptable to back a party that has US troops in Shannon and which sanctions corruption at the highest level.

We want to end the farce of social partnership.

This year the latest deal on social partnership comes up for a vote. Workers will once again be told that they must accept tiny pay rises, which in reality amount to wage cuts, for the good of the economy.

If we organise well and campaign throughout workplaces, we can end this farce for once and for all.

We want to end Irish involvement in Bush's wars.

Over one million US troops have gone through Shannon airport and a small Irish contingent has joined NATO forces which are occupying Afghanistan. March 2008, will see global protests on the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

We want to see large numbers on the streets to demand an end to support for these imperialist wars.

We want to get a No vote on the Lisbon Treaty.

The Irish people are the only ones who will vote on a revised version of the EU constitution known as the Lisbon Treaty. A population of just over 4 million will, in effect, be voting for a continent of over 450 million. Socialists are, therefore, duty bound to mount the most effective campaign to secure a No vote. The Socialist Workers Party will oppose the Lisbon Treaty on three grounds:

- It creates the legal basis for a neo-liberal Europe that safeguards rule by the large corporations.

- It gives sanction to a new EU militarism by giving a legal basis to battle groups and a co-ordinated increase in military spending in all EU countries.

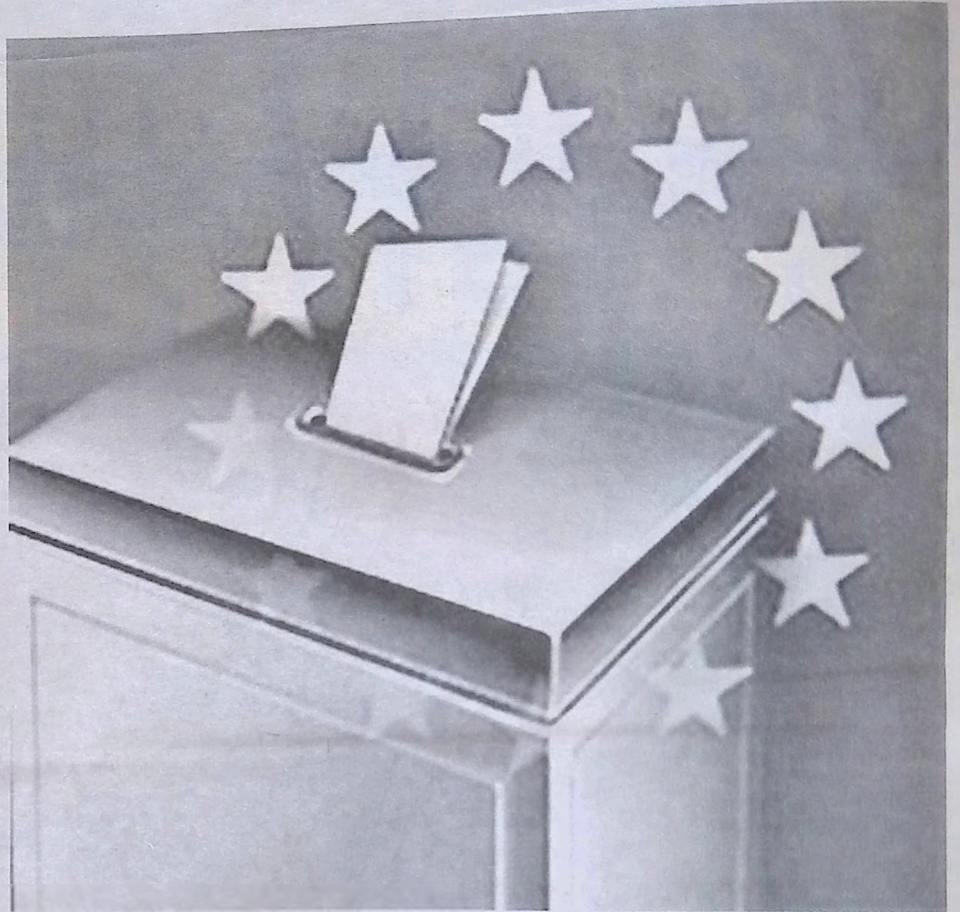
- It further erodes democracy by removing decision making to an arena dominated by unelected bureaucrats.

To help carry out all these perspectives, we need more activists to distribute our literature and help us to organise the many events we are involved in.

No matter how large or limited the time you have available, there is always a space for you in a socialist organisation. The main thing is to be committed to being involved and active.

As we start into 2008, we invite you to make a resolution to do something to bring change to Ireland and the wider world.

Lisbon Treaty will bring major changes



By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

THE UCD sociologist Kieran Allen has written a new guide to the current EU Lisbon Treaty. He shows it will bring major changes for the people of Ireland and Europe.

Kieran Allen said, "The political elite in Europe are implying that the Lisbon Treaty amounts to a series of house-keeping changes and does not bring any fundamental change.

"However, this is clearly wrong. The Treaty is substantially the same as the EU constitution which was rejected by the populations on France and Holland".

"After that rejection, a small elite group of 'wise men' in the Amato group – named after a former Italian politician – worked behind closed doors to insert the substance of the EU Constitution into two older treaties.

"Quite deliberately, they have shrouded the whole procedure in a forbidding complexity to discourage people examining its provisions.

"Amato has since conceded that 'they decided to make the document 'unreadable' to enable EU politicians to claim it did not require a referendum".

"Bertie Ahern has equally conceded that '90 percent of the EU constitution is still there'.

Among the major changes that the Lisbon Treaty will bring are:

- A requirement on member states to increase military spending. Article 27-3 states that 'Member states shall undertake progressively to improve their military capabilities'

- A legal requirement, forcing member states to make troops available for EU battle groups (Article 27-3)

- A solidarity clause that can be invoked if one member state is subject to a terrorist attack.

While solidarity is indeed laudable, the experience of September 11th, however, demonstrates that cynical politicians can use such clauses to involve others in wars against innocent civilians.

- A fast-track system whereby the Commission can conduct negotiations with agencies such as the World Trade Organisation on the premises of promoting

- a) 'the achievement of uniformity in measures of liberalisation'

- b) the 'progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade and on foreign direct investment' (articles 188).

- In practice this implies a greater push towards privatisation and globalisation that will become binding on member states.

- The more formal creation of an EU state which has its own distinct 'legal personality'

- Greater use of Qualified Majority Voting to give the EU more 'competencies' over member states.

Thanks to the legal actions of Raymond Crotty, the Irish people are the only people who can vote of these hugely important issues.

We should exercise that vote on behalf of the whole people of Europe.

Myth: EU defender of social rights

THE NEW treaty is being sold as progressive because it includes social and human rights clauses.

A recent test case in the European Court of Justice, the EU's highest court, showed the limits of such clauses.

While European Union (EU) leaders were signing the neoliberal European Treaty, the fight over whether the right to make a profit is more fundamental than

the rights of workers was continuing in the European courts.

In a case similar to the Irish Ferries dispute, the ECJ reviewed the case of trade unions preventing the Finnish shipping company Viking from replacing a local crew on a loss-making ferry with cheaper Estonian workers.

The court said unions were allowed to take collective action if jobs

and work conditions were under threat.

But it also said that collective action would be illegal if it restricted the EU's freedom of establishment, which guarantees a company's right to carry out economic activity in other member states.

The ruling essentially fudges the issue on "social dumping".

David Cockroft, general secretary of the International Transport

Workers' Federation, which spearheaded the Viking dispute, said, "We welcome the court's assertion that the right to strike is a fundamental right."

But he added, "The devil's in the detail."

The ruling could be used by employers to attempt to impose lower wages across the EU on the basis that any action, "restricts the right of freedom of establishment".

General strike victory in Greece

by KATERINA THOIDOU, Greece

THE EMPLOYMENT minister responsible for implementing controversial pension reforms in Greece, Vassilis Magginas, resigned in December following a general strike that brought the country to a standstill.

Officially he resigned due to a personal scandal involving the alleged employment of uninsured immigrant workers at his holiday home. But his hasty departure was widely seen as a victory for the movement.

Greece was paralysed for 24 hours as every workplace, from bus garages to airports and shipyards to hospitals, was shut down.

Huge demonstrations took place in every major city. It is estimated that half a million strikers took to the streets.

In Athens the demonstration was headed by the entire workforce of Olympic Airlines in their uniforms.

Striking post workers were out in force. And there was a strong contingent of workers from power stations in their orange hats.

There were wild cheers from the crowd when these workers used their ladders to climb up lamp-posts and blind police cameras that had been ordered to spy on the demonstrators.

This was the biggest strike mobilisation in 15 years.

Striking lawyers, doctors, journalists and engineers added an extra dimension. But the picture that appeared on the front page of every paper the next day was of a group of women workers from a small garment workshop.

They marched under a red banner with the slogan "Hands off women" signed by Workers Solidarity, Socialist Worker's sister paper in Greece.

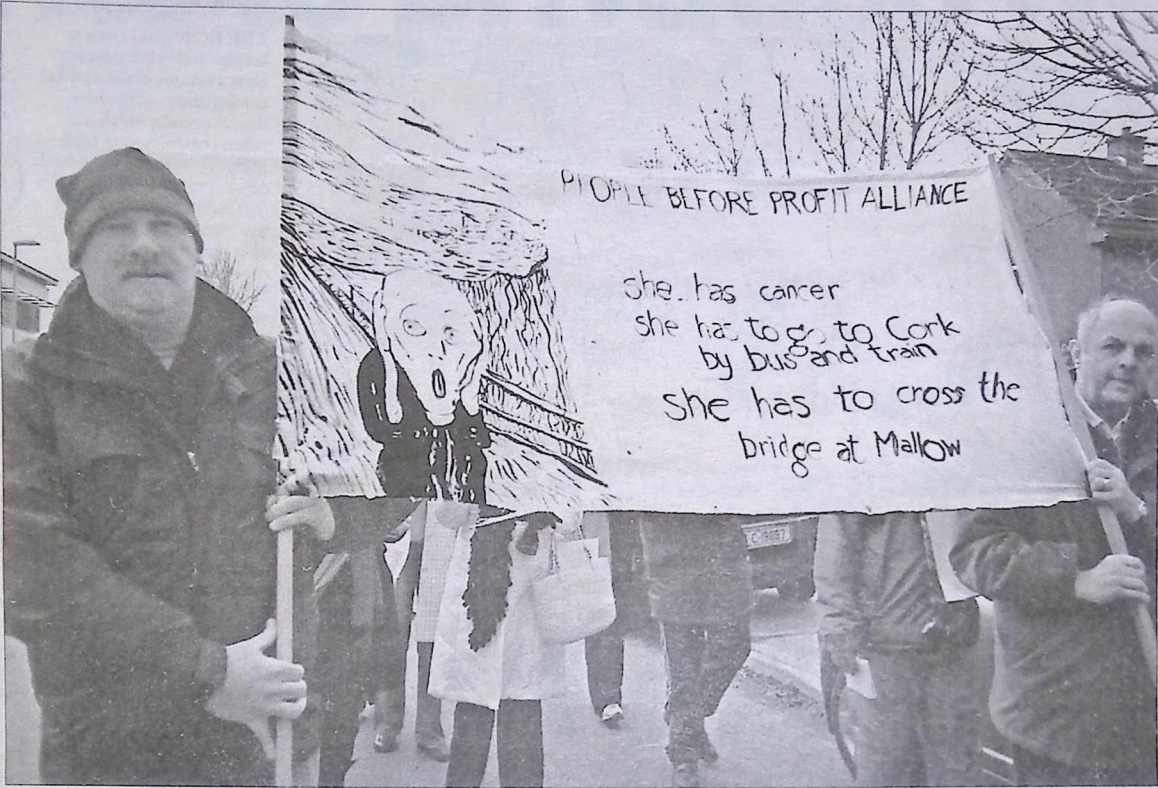
The New Democracy right wing government's pension "reform" plan specifically targets retirement by women before 60. It aims to reduce the number of workers who currently qualify for early retirement.

It also forces the pension funds of various professions to be consolidated into a handful of groups. Managers of the funds will be appointed by government decree.

There was a wave of scandals this year with pension funds losing millions when they were invested in bonds under government guidance.

The Greek congress of trades unions (GSEE) is promising further action in the New Year if the government pushes its plans through parliament. Greece saw its biggest student wave of occupations in 2007. It looks like 2008 may be the year of the workers.

150 protest against cuts at Kerry General Hospital



by KIERAN MCNULTY, TRALEE

LAST MONTH almost two hundred people took part in a protest at the entrance to Kerry General Hospital (KGH) against the transfer of cancer services to Cork University Hospital.

The protest was called by the West Kerry Action Group was supported by a broad cross section of the public and included a large contingent of Kerry members of People Before Profit.

The turnout was even more remarkable given that the protest took place on a Sunday two days before Christmas Day.

The removal of cancer services means at least a two hour journey to Cork for Kerry people. This is a direct contradiction to the HSE's stated aim of providing for a community based service.



Protesting at the removal of cancer services

photos: Marie Duffy

These journeys have been described as "purgatory" by Margaret O'Sullivan, an activist who has been lobbying local politicians to oppose the removal of cancer services.

The number of patients presenting to KGH with malignant cancers in 2001 (the last year for which figures are available) was 522. Breast cancer was the diagnosis in most

women, prostate cancer the most common amongst men. Estimates for cases in the future are expected to rise, particularly when one takes into account the county's increasing population.

KGH has only recently provided for a comprehensive breast check facility. It has no diabetic consultant, renal treatment and a significantly under resourced cardiology unit while the angiography service which provides x-rays of blood vessels was actually closed down in 2005.

People Before Profit is campaigning for:

A reversal in the removal of local health services and the scrapping of the two-tier health service to be replaced by free universal health care based on need not profit

For more information about People Before Profit Alliance Kerry, contact Kevin on 0868406335.

Victory for Iraq war resisters in Canada

US WAR resisters – soldiers who fled to Canada rather than serve in Iraq – have won a significant victory in their campaign for asylum.

A key committee in the Canadian parliament has ruled that the soldiers had the right to refuse to serve in a war if it is not sanctioned by the United Nations.

The committee recommended that the government allow Iraq war resisters and their families to stay in Canada. It also called for an immediate halt to all deportation proceedings.

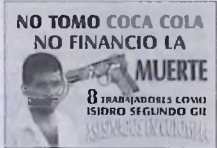
This ruling came after the committee heard the testimony of former US army sergeant Philip McDowell.

McDowell joined the army in 2001 following the 9/11 attacks on the US. He served a year in Iraq, ending his tour of duty in March 2005.

But a month and a half after being discharged, he was ordered back into the army under the notorious "stop-loss" policy which allows the US army to re-enlist former soldiers. McDowell then fled to Canada.

He told a recent anti-war rally that "thousands of soldiers in the military have told me that they feel the same way".

Coca-Cola union activists face death threats in Colombia



THREE WORKERS at Coca-Cola in Bucaramanga, Colombia, face death threats for their trade union activities.

The three men – Luis Eduardo, Jose Domingo and Nelson Perez – have been told that they will be killed and buried in a mass grave unless their Sinaltrainal union stops protesting against Coca-Cola.

Sinaltrainal president Javier Correa and his family have received similar threats. Since 1994 nine Coca-Cola workers have been murdered by death squads in an attempt to stop trade union resistance.

Paramilitary group Aguilas Negras (black eagles) has claimed responsibility for these and other death threats.

Campaigners point out that the Colombian government has legitimised paramilitary groups, and are demanding the government breaks the impunity currently enjoyed by Aguilas Negras. They are also demanding that Coca-Cola act to protect their employees and to demand that Aguilas Negras are brought to justice.

Bali: a wasted opportunity to save the planet

By MARTIN EMPSON

MILLIONS OF people hoped that the latest United Nations (UN) talks on climate change in Bali would kick start the urgent action that the world desperately needs.

Predictions from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) paint a bleak picture of the future. By 2020 between 75 and 250 million people worldwide will face "an increase in water stress due to climate change".

In the face of this urgent threat, the outcome of the Bali talks feels like a massive anticlimax. World leaders failed to set any targets on reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

Much has been made of the US government's refusal to commit to reduction targets and its attempt to deflect blame onto developing countries.

There were cheers when the US finally agreed to a compromise agreement, which might lead some to believe that a significant step forward had been taken.

But the agreement merely sets out a "roadmap" of further talks.

The US government repeatedly talks about the need for developing countries such as China to tackle emissions.

But although China is a major source of greenhouse gases, its emission level per head of the population is around 15 percent of that of the US.

In trying to shift the blame onto the developing world, the US is simply trying to avoid taking any action itself – action that it feels would harm its economic competitiveness.

This is appalling hypocrisy. Developed



The EU and the US are the worst offenders

countries like the EU and the US are by far the most significant contributors to the problem. With 5 percent of the world's population, the US is responsible for 30 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions.

During the Bali conference, the BBC interviewed scientific advisors to the British and German governments. They said that

governments had been too slow to act and that it was unlikely that the world would avoid "dangerous levels of climate change".

Despite the previous emissions agreement that emerged from the 1997 Kyoto conference, we have seen emissions rise in countries across the world – Japan's emissions are up 7 percent, Italy's by 7.4 percent, Spain's by almost 60 percent.

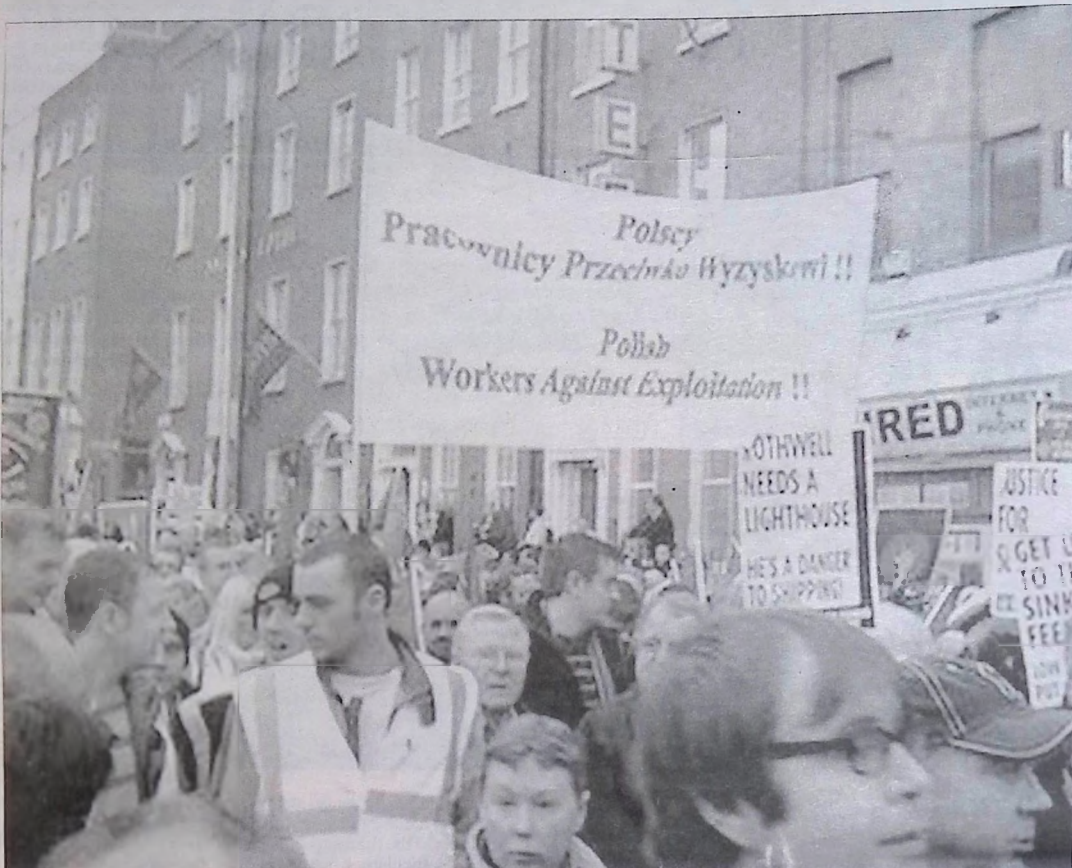
Discussing solutions to climate change raises broader political questions: Should money be spent on improving rail and bus services instead of continuing the road building programme?

Far from damaging ordinary people's lives, the sort of social changes that are needed to save the planet will actually improve living conditions – integrated and cheap public transport, decent public housing with proper insulation, more efficient use of power and less congested roads.

The international protests that took place during the Bali conference were impressive. They show the potential for grassroots movements to develop that challenge to government inaction, but also to the priorities of a system prepared to let the planet burn in the interest of the status quo.

Sinn Fein shame over Polish migrants gaff

Whatever happened to the idea of housing as a right?



by EAMONN McCANN

SINN FEIN MLA Martina Anderson reckons that Polish immigrants aren't the right sort of Catholics.

Counting them as Catholics is distorting employment statistics, she declared last month: "They should be categorised as having a background of 'other'."

"Employers do not perceive migrant workers as belonging to the local nationalist or unionist communities and this is artificially inflating the Catholic/nationalist representation in the workforce..."

"The same situation has arisen within the internal tracking systems of the PSNI making it difficult to track the true numbers of Catholics/nationalists...being appointed."

The basic argument is that treating migrants on the same basis as indigenous workers and including them in the reckoning of the religious balance makes it impossible to measure bias in any particular profession or workplace accurately: thus, levels of discrimination cannot be accurately determined.

The argument might have made



Above: Martina Anderson and top: Polish workers in Ireland

some imperfect sense 40 years ago. But it makes no sense today.

In the 1960s, there was a rational basis for believing that the reason for poverty in Catholic working-class areas was that Protestant areas had the lion's share of resources. It wasn't the whole story. But there was truth in it. So there was a basis for arguing that a fairer distribution of resources was part of the solution to the economic woes of areas like the Falls, the Bogside, etc.

But today, not only has the gap between the two communities narrowed significantly, the gap between the rich and the poor within each community has widened significantly. Now it makes no sense at all to see a redistribution of resources between communities as a solution to anything.

Moreover, a strategy based on mobilising to vindicate the interests of one community vis-à-vis the other community requires

workers to ally themselves with the wealthy of their "own" side. It entirely rules out a strategy based on class.

But it's clearer than ever that a strategy based on class is the key to tackling poverty generally. Could the minimum wage be raised to a decent level in the Falls but not in the Shankill? Lone parents' allowance? Could health cuts be varied from one community to the other? Would it have been possible for the non-payment campaign to force the abandonment of water charges as originally envisaged in Catholic areas but not in Protestant areas?

More fundamentally, the implication of Martina Anderson's statement is that the people of the North can properly be accounted for and entirely corralled within the designations Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist—and that no foreigner need apply for admission to either.

It is a narrow, reactionary view, rooted in communalism, verging on racism. Members of Sinn Fein should be embarrassed that the sentiment has been expressed in their name. They should speak out clearly and distance themselves from it.

by GARY BYRNE

THE HOUSING crisis in Ireland today is a painfully clear example of the natural consequences of the neo-liberal agenda which has taken centre stage in Irish political life in the last decade or so.

The rhetoric of housing as a right enshrined to all is now transparently contradicted by the plight of the most impoverished and marginalised members of Irish society. Like many other aspects of neo-liberal Ireland housing has become a commodity and led to the further concentration of wealth in the hands of 'the few'.

Put simply the property speculators and developers have accrued enormous fortunes while the poorest members of society struggle to pay the exorbitant levels of rent being currently charged on properties.

I would like to look at one often-ignored area of the housing sector: the private rented market.

Private rented accommodation, in Dublin in particular, offers socialists a clear working example of some of the most heinous aspects of modern capitalism.

Irish society has an undeniable fixation with home ownership with some 75% of all properties being owner occupied.

This represents the second highest level of home ownership in the EU with Spain being the only nation with a higher percentage of homeowners.

Of the remaining 25% of dwellings 13% are private rented accommodation while 5% constitute social housing.

These cursory figures reveal the large disparity between the private and social housing sectors in Ireland today.

In simple terms for every 1 unit of social housing there are 15 units of private accommodation in Ireland.

In 2006 the total output of social housing was 6,237 while 88,211 new private dwellings were constructed.

A closer look at those who rent their home reveals that renters are highly concentrated in urban centres and are far more likely to live in poverty than their home owning counterparts.

35% of people who rent in Ireland have incomes below the poverty line used by the EU while 20% live in consistent poverty.

It is obvious to anyone willing to look beyond the words of the latest Fianna Fail press release that the 'Celtic Tiger' has not benefited the entire nation.

The only way that a very narrow section of Irish society has been able to amass sickening levels of wealth is by further impoverishing the most vulnerable members of society.

The voluminous lists for local authority housing testify to the fact that the

government cannot meet the housing needs of the country.

Our so-called 'social welfare state' should in theory provide for those who cannot provide for themselves.

Government finds it more expedient and profitable to outsource this need.

The Rent Allowance payments essentially outsource government responsibility to provide housing for those who cannot provide it for themselves. We have all encountered those who decry our 'benefits culture' and bemoan government 'handouts' in the form of Rent Supplement.

If we consider what is actually being revealed when someone receives rent allowance a different picture presents itself.

Firstly in order to be eligible for rent supplement one has to be in receipt of some type of social welfare payment and be registered on a local authority housing list.

When a Welfare Officer releases a rent cheque what he or she is essentially saying is: 'you have a housing need, you are not in a position financially to meet that need, the state cannot meet that need therefore we will pay for you to rent in the private sector'.

Furthermore the current rent-caps are completely out of step with market rents and more often than not do not enable someone to source adequate accommodation that meets their needs.

The maximum amount allowed to a single under Rent Supplement is €560 per calendar month.

This figure will ensure that only the very lowest standard of bed-sit accommodation is available to a single man or woman.

The maximum amount available to a family with two children or more is €1,200 per calendar month.

As anyone with a passing knowledge of the rental market will know one would be hard stretched to find even a 2 bed for €1,200 in the current climate.

Prospective renters are also at the mercy of prejudicial landlords who in the vast majority of cases will simply not accept a tenant in receipt of rent supplement.

These rent caps are due for review in six months time.

It is unlikely in the current economic climate that they will be increased but even if they are landlords will simply increase rents accordingly the following day.

Concentrated centres of power continue to dominate the lives of the poorest sections of society.

As socialists we must fight the onslaught of privatisation and profiteering that surrounds us.

We must refute the myths and propaganda of the Right and continue work with all those interested in a more equitable form of social organisation.

Housing is a crucial battleground in the long war.

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Blue Gold: Government wants to privatise water

By GORDON HEWITT,
Campaign co-ordinator for
Communities Against the Water
Tax in Northern Ireland

JUST BEFORE Christmas primary schools right across Ireland were reeling from the receipt of their water bills.

Some schools were being charged as much as €50,000, a fee which would have seen them unable, or perhaps even refusing, to pay their water bills and therefore facing the possibility of having their water supply cut off.

Under pressure from the schools and the general public, the government's first response was to try and bluff their way through the crisis claiming, that the new "usage based charges" were fairer and the schools were only being asked to pay their way.

Ahern argued that the new charges were contained in the Programme for Government so they had to be implemented.

He was finally reduced to arguing that the charges were being driven forward by the demands of the European Directive for Water, so it was really nothing to do with the government.

(This last claim is completely untrue as a check of the European Directive will show that all it asks for is an adequate contribution to the payment of the water service and it doesn't say how much that should be.)

The backtracking began a few days later.

The water charges were not going to be introduced immediately, they were being postponed, they may not have been as fair as the government first thought and they may have to find a solution to financing the already stretched school budgets and ameliorate the worst aspects of the charges.

Finally, "a comprehensive statement" with regards the

government proposals, will be unleashed just before the kids go back to school around the 7th of January.

Why all the confusion?

The government's main objective is to remove the water service from public hands, but even more so than with other public services, this is immensely unpopular, with most people thinking that water is a right and that if we have to contribute to the cost this should be done through general taxation or through the various rates systems.

More importantly the water service should be held in public hands.

"Blue Gold"

Regardless of this opposition, water is a big money business and the half a dozen or so water multinationals who want to get their hands on the "Blue Gold" expect governments to pave the way.

There has already been outsourcing of water metering installation and non-domestic water projects in Dublin, Sligo and Galway to the private company Celtic Anlian Water.

In order to continue the moves in this direction, the Irish government has to win people away from the idea that major social services are better managed by the public sector.

In Northern Ireland the key arguments for water privatisation were that the public sector is inefficient and too costly.

That the public sector lags behind the private sector because private companies are disciplined by competition.

It was also argued that the water service needed investment and the government could not afford to pay for it, therefore we needed the private sector.

The new water charges were needed to pay for our water upgrade, and before the proposal was scrapped, it was argued that water metering and "usage based charges" would be implemented.

All these arguments turned out to be untrue and every single survey which has measured the effectiveness of the privatisation of water has concluded that it was better to maintain the water service in public hands.

Increased prices and massive profits

All that putting water into private hands has managed to achieve is an increase in the prices and massive profits for water companies and a general reduction in the quality of the service.

In fact in some places water is being renationalised.

The Irish government, committed to free market logic, is trying to shift the terrain of the argument to ideas which seem to make common sense i.e. that by allowing services to be managed publicly we are all paying much more than we should be.

If only we converted to the "usage-based" charges or the "user-pays" principle then all we would pay for would be what we actually use.

The built in assumption is that



we would all pay less because we really don't use very much.

They even try to suggest that "usage based charges" are more environmentally friendly because they punish the wasters

of water.

The simple facts are these arguments and the new charging mechanisms are designed to placate the water multinationals whose whole basis of existence is

to make billions from controlling the water supply.

As in Bolivia, where a massive campaign defeated water privatisation, and north of the border, where we have at least

managed to postpone the drive towards privatisation and have stopped the introduction of separate charges, we need to fight to maintain an essential service in public hands.

How we stopped privatisation last time

By ANDREW PAYNE

THE PEOPLE of Waterford's struggle against water charges in the 1980s and 90s is a shining example to all of how popular protest can be and is successful.

On 13 September 1994, two corporation workers disconnected the water supply of a schoolteacher living in the Hillview estate in Waterford who had refused to pay service charges.

When the work was completed, local women and children surrounded their van.

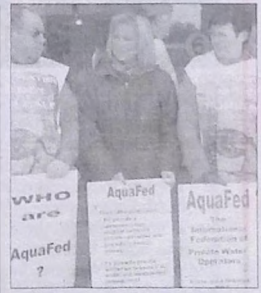
Over the next five hours about 70 more people joined the protest and declared they would not move until the Waterford City Manager gave an assurance that there would be no more cut-offs.

Eventually more than 40 Gardai from around the county arrived on the scene and a stand off ensued.

The Gardai used force and manhandled people out of the way to clear a path for the van to exit the estate.

Outraged by the violence that had been displayed against them, 150 people marched to the local barracks and staged a protest outside.

Tommy Hogan was active in the fight against water charges in Waterford from their



EPSU protest outside the AQUAFED offices on World Water Day 22 March 2006

inception.

Outraged by the decision to charge ordinary people for an essential service, residents associations in Waterford along with local political organisations such as the SWP, the Workers Party, Labour members and trade unions met that year to create the Combined Residents and Tenants Against Water Charges group.

The group's slogan was 'Water Charges No Way, Can't Pay, Won't Pay'.

The group began lobbying local councillors, going as far as to call at the door of councillors and demand answers if they supported charges.

As the campaign escalated

the group took on a solicitor to represent those brought to court and even plumbers to reconnect the water supply to those cut off.

Initially, those who refused to pay water charges were brought to court.

Tommy explains how he himself appeared before the courts, 'being in front of the courts gave you an opportunity to give a big speech for five minutes.

'When you came out of the court you'd then get interviews with the local media and it gave you a chance to publicise the whole issue to a wider audience.'

As court orders failed to work, the council attempted to intimidate residents further by threatening that those entitled to education grants and other allowances would not be given them unless they paid.

In the end however this, like the court orders, was not enough to break the determination of the campaigners.

After the failure of all other measures, the council in 1993 began cutting off water to those who refused to pay.

The move was blocked through the courts in Dublin but went ahead in Waterford where water was cut off from

families' homes.

This is when the protestors took to recruiting plumbers. Some of the council's own plumbers came forward to volunteer to help the group as well as others who had gained plumbing knowledge over time.

The Combined Residents and Tenants Against Water Charges group was then able to promise all residents that they would not be cut off for more than 24 hours as they would be reconnected from next door.

It was from this movement that the blockades on workers cutting off residents' water came about.

Eighteen months prior to the Hillview incident, a similar event took place on Brown's Road where 1,000 people gathered to prevent council workers from leaving for nearly twelve hours.

After the defeat in Hillview, the council never again attempted to cut off water in Waterford. Soon afterwards mass resistance led to the charges being suspended in 1996.

If everyone refuses to pay a charge on an essential service then it can never be sold.

Why would a private company buy something that they know no one will ever pay for? They never will.

There has already been outsourcing of water metering installation and non-domestic water projects in Dublin, Sligo and Galway to the private company Celtic Anlian Water.

International protests planned for fifth anniversary of Iraq invasion



Delegates in London last month

Photo: Guy Smallman

On December 1st, at a conference organised by Stop The War Coalition in London, over 1,100 delegates representing over 26 countries voted on the declaration below.

Central to the declaration is a call to protest on the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq in March 2008. One of the principal demands has to be 'no attack on Iran'.

While recent CIA intelligence reports (See Guardian Dec 4) play down the threat of Iran's nuclear capacity thereby suggesting that there will be no US attack, we should not assume the threat has gone away and cease protesting.

The US continue to amass a large force in the Gulf and Bush remains defiant that Iran is still a problem.

Senior Israeli officials warned on Dec 8 that they were still considering a military strike against Iran and on Dec 10 US defence secretary, Robert Gates, urged Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to develop a joint air and missile shield to ward off future threats.

Clearly the antiwar movement has to continue to highlight that an attack on Iran is a very real possibility, particularly as the mainstream media would have us believe otherwise.

The Irish Anti War Movement demonstration will be on March 15 with calls for troops out of Iraq, troops out of Shannon and no attack on Iran.

Declaration of World Against War conference

This conference of delegates from peace, anti-war, anti-imperialist and liberation movements across the world declares its opposition to the "endless war" prosecuted by the US government against states, peoples and movements in all parts of our planet.

We oppose the interference of the US and its allies in sovereign states, and assert the right of all peoples to self-determination. We support all people fighting for peace and against imperialism.

In particular, we demand:

■ An immediate end to the illegal military occupation of Iraq, which has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and displaced millions of people, a withdrawal of all foreign troops and the full transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi people and their representatives.

■ A halt to all preparations for an attack against Iran, and a commitment to solve any issues through exclusively diplomatic means.

■ A withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, allowing the Afghan people to determine their own future.

■ Justice for the Palestinian people, and an end to Israeli aggression throughout the Middle East.

■ An end to plans for US missile defence, and that all states actively pursue nuclear disarmament.

We affirm the solidarity of all those fighting for peace, social justice and self-determination worldwide, and commit ourselves to strengthening our unity and developing new forms of co-operation.

We therefore designate the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq as a worldwide day of action in support of the demands NO ATTACK on IRAN and TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN and call on all national anti-war movements to hold mass protests and demonstrations on that day.

DERRY ANTI WAR COALITION



DEFEND THE RAYTHEON 9

RESISTING WAR CRIMES IS NOT A CRIME



Raytheon 9 trial by actions of t

by DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

FOR THOSE not living in Derry, it has been hard to find out what is happening in relation to the trial of the Raytheon 9.

The trial process is dragging on in a way that is very unfair to the defendants, their families, and the Derry Anti War Coalition (DAWC). The Nine are charged with affray and criminal damage and, if found guilty, could face long prison sentences.

In Derry over the New Year, I learnt that the lack of information is due to a gagging order that has been imposed by the Judge, Corinna Philpot, and enthusiastically obeyed by the media.

Wed January 7th will see the latest episode in this long-running saga. It seems that delays to the trial happening are caused by the State's determination to shift the trial away from Derry and to keep the issues at stake hidden from the public.

After earlier delays, the trial had been due to start on November 19th last. Anti-war activists from all over Ireland gathered outside the courthouse that morning to offer their solidarity.

However, a series of issues introduced by the Judge meant that there were further delays.

It is widely believed in Derry that the State intends to move the trial to Belfast where, it thinks, the jury will be less sympathetic to the actions of the defendants.

The reasons for the delay, and for the

gagging order, are unconvincing, even bizarre, confirming the ulterior motives of the State.

The irony is that all the mainstream parties in Derry have denounced the Raytheon 9. No local media outlet had had a good word to say about their action. So, it seems that the establishment is not as confident as they like to pretend that the Raytheon 9 are isolated in Derry.

Maybe that's because the actions of the DAWC members has put the spotlight on the human impact of Raytheon's activities.

The occupation was prompted by the Israeli massacre at Qana, Lebanon on 30th July 2006.

Then, 27 people, all of them civilians, many of them children, were killed when the building in which they were sheltering was brought down by a "bunker-buster" weapon. Israel's main supplier of bunker-busters is Raytheon.

The DAWC felt it necessary to repudiate its town's complicity in this kind of war crime – hence the occupation.

However, this aspect of the Raytheon 9 case is systematically ignored by the SDLP, Sinn Fein and Unionists who make up Derry City Council. They prefer to concentrate on "threat to jobs."

Raytheon's arrival in Derry was announced in 1999 by Nobel Peace Prize winners, John Hume and David Trimble. It was welcomed by all the parties, including

Sinn Fein, on the basis that the Derry facility would not be involved in arms-related manufacture.

The pledge that there would be no arms-related work at the Derry plant was exposed as phoney in 2004 by journalists and former employees of Raytheon.

At that time, the SDLP and Sinn Fein reiterated their stance in relation to opposing arms-related work, but took no action in spite of being presented with the sworn affidavits of two former workers that the Derry plant was producing software for high tech weaponry.

Since then, Freedom of Information documents have revealed both SDLP and SF councillors colluding with the company while publicly taking a principled stand.

For example, the FOI documents brought to light a 1999 statement from the then NI economy minister Adam Ingram.

Welcoming Raytheon's winning of a major contract from the Ministry of Defence, Ingram paid tribute to the SDLP for influencing the MoD decision: "Extensive lobbying by the Secretary of State and myself, together with local politicians including David Trimble, Seamus Mallon and John Hume has influenced a decision which will bring further opportunities to people here."

"The contract will lead to Raytheon accelerating the establishment of its software development centre in Londonderry."

Sinn Fein also see thing in public, another

The minutes of Raytheon's St McConnell o Raytheon's Derry c 2005, begin: "Steve had a positive meet Derry [Gearoid O'h the relationship wit Council."

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The Raytheon Nine Photo: Dave Mitchell



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Sinn Fein also seemed to be saying one
thing in public, another in private.

The minutes of a meeting between
Raytheon's Stephen Lewis and Jim
McConnell of Invest NI held in
Raytheon's Derry office on January 27th
2005, begin: "Steve Lewis reported that he
had a positive meeting with the Mayor of
Derry [Gearoid O'hEara of Sinn Fein] re.
the relationship with Raytheon and Derry
Council."

All the mainstream
Northern parties are
neo-liberals now.
The model of economic
development which they
see as the only way forward
depends on the areas they
represent being able to
compete with other areas
— including other areas
of Northern Ireland — for
available investment. "If
we don't accept these jobs,
somebody else will," runs
the refrain.

The argument is
commonly applied also to
questions of wages levels,
work patterns, union
rights and the protection

of the environment, as
well as, more generally, to
defence of public services
and public-sector jobs.
Multinational companies
demand the abandonment
of decency as the price of
their dubious beneficence.

The deployment of
the jobs-at-any-cost
argument does not arise
from a defective political
or personal character
but from the iron logic of
capitalism.

It is the position
inevitably, necessarily
adopted by politicians
and parties who have no
perspective, or who have

Like the mainstream parties, the Courts
seem determined to hide the issues behind
the occupation from the public.

Thus, the Judge claims that perfectly
peaceful demos outside the court could in-
timidate jurors.

She called for police video of the demo on
Nov. 19th to be shown in court, apparently
to support proposals to move the trial from
Derry. All mention of solidarity demos has
also been banned from the press.

In a bizarre development in December, the

abandoned a perspective,
of mobilising those at the
bottom of society to oppose
the dictates of big business,
of supporting those
exploited by big business,
and of striving to keep
alive a vision of a different,
better society which rejects
war and the arms trade
which fuels war.

The above is taken from the
DAWC pamphlet Resisting War
Crimes Is Not a Crime: The
Raytheon 9. The pamphlet can
be obtained by emailing the
DAWC: resistderry@aol.com,
phoning 0044771781958 or
via Paypal on www.raytheon9.org
Pamphlets are £2 or 3 euro
each.

Judge cited as possible contempt an article
in the Sunday Tribune on the day before the
trial was to have started.

The article had mentioned possible wit-
nesses to be called by the defence from
USA and Lebanon. This is common
practice in newspaper articles, but the judge
suggested it might be contempt of court.

Another standard journalistic practice,
that of mentioning possible long jail terms
if the defendants are found guilty, could also
amount to contempt said the judge because
it might influence jurors.

Meanwhile, papers throughout these islands
had headlines reading "Canoe man could
face five years."

Unfortunately, the mainstream media seem
to have accepted the gag without protest.
Concepts like freedom of speech and free-
dom of assembly do not seem to apply to
anti-war protestors.

But the anti-war movement will continue
its protests. The trial now expected to start
sometime in February. The Raytheon 9 will
resist any decision to move the trial out of
Derry.

The DAWC is affiliated to both the Irish
Anti War Movement and Stop the War
Coalition.

It has received support from the Rossport
5, Anti War Ireland, Catholic Worker and
War Resisters International. So, wherever
the trial is held where there will be large
and lively protests.

Human Rights body condemns Irish government on torture flights



US Air Force plane at Shannon

SHORTLY BEFORE
Christmas, the Irish
Commission on Human
Rights (ICHR) presented
its report on the issue of
so-called "extraordinary
rendition" flights to the
joint-Oireachtas committee
on foreign affairs, in which
it roundly condemned the
Irish governments continued
facilitation of these flights.

The report stated clearly
that the CIA-run "renditions"
programme was, in fact,
one of illegal kidnapping
and transfer of prisoners
for the purposes of torture
and insisted that the Irish
government is failing to
comply with its human rights
obligations by allowing these
flights to stop-over in Irish
airports.

The ICHR rejected
as insufficient the Irish
government's claim that
it had received diplomatic
assurances from the US
government that prisoners
are on board the flights when
they land in Ireland.

The ICHR report pointed
out that an investigation
by the Secretary General
of the Council of Europe
"concluded that mere
assurances by foreign states
that their agents abroad
complied with international
law and national law were
not enough to satisfy its
obligations under the
European Convention on
Human Rights."

Various UN bodies
have also stated that such
diplomatic assurances from
the US were inadequate. The
ICHR report also highlighted
the fact that both the Council
of Europe commissioner for
human rights and the UN
Commissioner on Human
Rights had repeated this point
to the Irish government in
recent visits to Ireland.

Although the anti-war
movement and various
NGO's have been protesting
for some time now on the
issue of torture flights being
facilitated in Ireland, the
ICHR report is particularly
significant in that it comes
from a state funded body with
statutory responsibility to
advise the government on its
human rights obligations.

Now official bodies at UN,
EU and national level have all
said that the Irish government
is flouting its human rights
obligations in allowing these

flights to land in Irish airports
without even searching them.

Despite being signatory to
the European Convention on
human rights and repeated
claims that it subscribes to
international law as laid down
by the UN, the government's
response to the ICHR report
has been to immediately
dismiss it. In their statements
on the report, the government
have claimed yet again that
diplomatic assurances it
has received from the US
government that no prisoners
are being transferred through
Irish airports are adequate.

The governments position
is hardly surprising given
that they have now allowed
over one million US troops
through Shannon airport on
route to fight a criminal war
in Iraq while still claiming
that Ireland's military
neutrality is in tact.

Bertie Ahern's government
are clearly up to their necks
in collaborating with both the
US war machine and its CIA
run torture programme.

Tragically, the Green Party,
that previously played such
a vocal role in opposing the
government's policies on US
troops and torture flights at
Shannon, have now joined the
government which continues
to collaborate with the US
war machine and its regime
of kidnap and torture.

The ICHR are calling on
the government to instigate
an inspections regime
to ensure that all flights
suspected of involvement
in the torture and kidnap
programme are searched.

While such a regime
would be an improvement on
the current situation it is not
enough.

As long as the US
continues its murderous
occupations of Iraq and
Afghanistan and continues
to operate a programme of
kidnap and torture in any part
of the world, US military and
CIA aircraft should not be
allowed to use Irish airports.

As we approach the
International protests that will
take place across the world
on the fifth anniversary of the
US invasion of Iraq in March,
the anti-war movement and
all those concerned with
human rights in Ireland need
to demand an end to our
governments collaboration
with US warmongering and
torture.

US Elections: Looking for change but none on offer

By BRIAN KELLY,
US socialist

THE GREAT challenge facing US presidential candidates in both the main political parties, the *Wall Street Journal* observed recently, is to "figure out how to get in front of the public's mood for change."

The long run up to the November elections, which began with Barack Obama's stunning upset over Hillary Clinton in the Iowa primaries earlier this month, occurs against a backdrop of serious and growing economic instability, popular opposition to the war in Iraq, and massive dissatisfaction with the Washington establishment that runs both political parties.

As a number of observers have noted, whatever the outcome of the election next fall, it will serve as a marker of the end of the so-called Reagan-Bush era, a period of conservative dominance that shifted American politics sharply to the right, handing over federal power to corporate interests and gutting the substantial gains that working people had been able to secure after a period of dramatic trade union and social struggles in the decades straddling the mid-twentieth century.

There is a sense in which the US economy has been in crisis all through the boom years, of course.

Dramatic rises in corporate salaries, record profits for certain sectors of the economy, strong growth and flush times on the stock exchange have come at a price, and that price has been paid by working people and the poor, who have seen public services gutted, the meager provisions for social welfare dramatically cut back, and real wages either stagnant or on the decline.

Beyond that the first clear signs of a crisis that would have an effect beyond the ranks of the working poor emerged more than a year ago when the bubble burst in the sub-prime mortgage lending sector.

The long property boom that has helped to conceal more fundamental problems has come to a dramatic end, and across the US the hype that attached itself to real estate has been replaced

by despair.

When you add to this the economic problems that the Bush administration has piled up in trying to finance its wars abroad, and the steep rise in inflation that many fear will now follow in the wake of oil price hikes, the picture in some places is one of near-panic, and this is the backdrop in which the elections occur.

Thus even the corporate press acknowledges widespread voter alienation and a mood for change among the electorate.

The *Wall Street Journal* finds "a nation in the midst of the most prolonged period of public dissatisfaction in 15 years," noting that the numbers for voters registering as independents in reports is now at 22%, a number which has doubled over the past 15 years.

The corporate right worries that these trends could fuel a retreat from neo-liberal worship of the free market and back to-

ward demands for government intervention in the economy, and particularly in the demand for state-funded national health care.

But it is reassured by the fact that not a single Democratic candidate has advocated such a course of action.

The crisis has an effect on both political parties, however, and perhaps most severely within the Republican party, which now seems heading for a messy internal fight between the Christian Right, which has supplied the activist core that delivered results for the Reagan-Bush agenda, and pro-business rightwingers like Giuliani and McCain who see the religious extremism as a liability in the new era now taking shape.

In the Democratic party too, the Iowa results show, there is a clear reaction against the party establishment which may make it

difficult for Hillary Clinton to pull off her machine-driven romp to the nomination that was so widely predicted even months ago.

Outside the Beltway

The ground has shifted beneath her feet, and though Clinton's handlers are trying to adapt, it may be too late to try to recast her as an 'outside the beltway' agent of change when she has so carefully cultivated an image as the safe, dead-center candidate that stands for nothing at all.

As the Iowa results show, Illinois Senator Barack Obama has been the main beneficiary of this shift in the political terrain.

After initially deciding on a strategy that deliberately steered clear of confrontation, his campaign presented him in the primaries as the candidate of change.

"The tide began to turn last summer," Bob Moser observed in *The Nation*, "when Obama and his surrogates were recasting his image from that of a brainy harbinger of a new 'colorblind' politics to latter-day extension of the civil rights movement." But beneath the re-imagining there is little substance.

If anything he has moved to the right in recent months, reassuring American Zionists that he will be a strong supporter of Israel and explicitly disavowing any intention of a swift withdrawal from Iraq.

Instead he has advocated a phased withdrawal, with substantial troop numbers left behind to "protect our diplomats and carry out targeted strikes on Al Qaeda."

The gap between what is on offer from the political establishment from both parties and the massive dissatisfaction among

ordinary Americans has never been more stark.

The context is one which presents real opportunities for the left and the antiwar movement, and for drawing together the disparate strands of anger into a movement that can challenge the status quo regardless of who occupies the White House this time next year.

The pressures will be great for a revival of the 'anybody but Bush' sentiment that drove many on the left into supporting the right-wing candidacy of John Kerry last time around—strengthened, this time around, by lofty rhetoric about the possibility of electing the first woman, or the first African American, to the presidency.

But the left must resist such pressures and instead focus on building a movement that can deliver the real change that ordinary people demand.

Is Barack Obama the candidate to bring change?

IS AMERICAN ready for a black president? For a woman in the White House?

This is the tone of the contrived 'controversy' that has dominated media speculation about a Clinton or Obama presidency.

But beneath the salacious and usually self-congratulatory soul-searching about 'how far American has come,' one simple question seems to lie aside: Will either of them bring change?

After working very deliberately in the early stages of the campaign to present himself as 'beyond' race, Barack Obama has in recent weeks adopted a very different strategy: his campaign adopted the 'color blind' approach in nearly all-white Iowa, but in heavily black southern states like South Carolina he has presented himself as the embodiment of the civil rights struggle, even to the point of lapsing into local dialect to win support from an



Democratic contenders: Obama and Clinton

ambivalent black constituency.

With the Clinton campaign leaning heavily on those elements in the black establishment loyal to the former President, Obama has had his work cut out trying to make inroads into an African American population which could play a pivotal role in certain states but which is rightly cynical about what's on offer from the politicians.

The trick for the Obama

camp seems to be doing just enough to pull reluctant black voters aside without alienating potential white constituents.

Thus he has been public from the beginning about distancing himself from the notion that the government has an important role to play in overcoming inequality, pushing individual responsibility and entrepreneurship

instead.

At times he has gone further, indulging in racial stereotypes.

In April last year he told the black legislative caucus that a "good economic development plan for our community would be if we make sure folks weren't throwing garbage out their cars," a maneuver that as one activist noted displayed "not fresh thinking but the oldest racial stereotypes."

Translation: black people are dirty and lazy." "He's what some working-class black people perceive as a middle-class Negro," another noted.

"Anyway, let's face it. You don't get a revolution from Harvard."

Obama's campaign received a boost recently when multimillionaire talk-show host Oprah Winfrey declared her support.

Winfrey accompanied him on a South Carolina campaign tour, a tour that saw Obama's star rising among African

American voters even as Hillary Clinton's declined from 55% to under a third.

One Green Party activist who attended an Obama rally recalled being "really moved by it...by the yearning of people who were there to have someone representing them and their interests."

"I understand the yearning", she recalled. "But I don't think that is what's happening with Barack Obama. [Both he and Clinton] are both chameleons...people across the board are being sold a bill of goods."

Former Rainbow Coalition activist Kevin Gray agrees: "People say they're voting for Obama because they want a change. A change to what?... Obama is a candidate who happens to be black... That's fine, but it's not what we need. Obama's campaign is not a movement. It is someone running for office... A movement has to be about something...."

Kenya: Neoliberal policies fuel ethnic tensions



The current crisis results from the massive swing against Mwai Kibaki's sitting government

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

NEWS REPORTS of the crisis in Kenya are filled with shock that what they call one of Africa's most stable democracies should collapse suddenly into rioting and ethnic conflict.

Zahid, a socialist activist in Nairobi, told Socialist Worker: "The current crisis results from the massive swing against Mwai Kibaki's sitting government. 20 former ministers lost their seats in the parliamentary election. The feeling that the elections were rigged as the government rushed Kibaki's re-inauguration and banned live media coverage."

If Kibaki is allowed to get away with stealing this election there could be an end to civil freedoms and the right to organise politically.

Raila Odinga, leader of the opposition Orange Democratic

Movement, has called himself "the people's president", but ODM has not offered leadership to the demonstrators on the streets.

The party has not even called for an independent inquiry into election fraud.

What is more it has nothing serious to say about the real grievances that are leading to the ethnic fighting—chronic unemployment and lack of housing in the cities and landlessness in the countryside.

"While President Kibaki is from the largest ethnic group, the Kikuyu, that is not why he was elected. The National Rainbow Coalition (Narc), which he stood for in 2002, promised reform. Ordinary people hoped for more democratic rights and an end to the corruption of the Moi era".

Zahid told Socialist Worker, "But he didn't deliver. Millions of Kenyans continue to live below

the poverty line. The high growth rates that international bankers talk about have only affected the rich."

Michael Holman wrote in the Financial Times, "the gap between the haves and the have-nots is widening. To see the crisis only in terms of tribal allegiances and ethnic clashes is to miss a vital element in the Kenyan picture. The population has doubled in 25 years to 31 million. Unemployment is growing, and the number without land is growing. For these people there is nothing to lose by taking to the streets, driven by frustration and fury that transcend their tribe."

The government was defeated in a referendum in 2005 because people felt it was trying to introduce authoritarian rule. It has also been enmeshed in corruption scandals.

Each of the contending parties is committed to free market

policies.

The World Bank pushed neoliberal policies of privatisation and deregulation on Kenya. These policies inevitably lead to less democratic control and accountability and created an economy where corruption could thrive. Anti corruption measures targeted the poor rather than pursuing the businessmen who bribed Western arms firms.

The main divide in Kenya is not between ethnic groups, but between rich and poor. The people who are suffering are the urban and rural poor.

Zahid added, "One of the most important things to understand is that the violence is not new. Millions of Kenyans have already been experiencing ethnic strife, particularly in areas like Eldoret in the Rift Valley.

There is huge competition for scarce fertile land, especially in

areas like the Rift Valley where much of the worst ethnic violence has occurred.

Despite events such as the massacre of more than 30 people in a church in Eldoret in the Rift Valley, the majority of the 300 fatalities so far have been caused by the police opening fire on people.

And these are not simply ethnic attacks on non-Kikuyu's. In the Kariobangi slum GSU (paramilitary police) attacked Kikuyu slum dwellers. The Kikuyu people make up some 22 percent of the Kenyan population and are the single largest group, they are one of more than 40 groups in the country.

Impoverished slums like Kibera have been battlegrounds between ethnic gangs such as the Kikuyu Mungiki, the Luhya Jeshi La Mzee or the Luo Taliban—named for the fear it is likely

to raise rather than any political links.

Mungiki originally emerging as a sect that said it would bring back the spirit of the Mau Mau rebellion and fight for rights for the dispossessed, it degenerated into a violent gang living on extortion mostly from Kikuyu people in the slums, although as with many such slum organisations it was always believed to have the backing of senior politicians.

Now it is re-emerging saying it will defend Kikuyus from other ethnic groups.

Any national unity government committed to neoliberalism will keep attacking the poor as the current government has done for the past five years. There is also a real danger of events degenerating into ever more serious ethnic division and "cleansing" as different ruling factions try to win control by force.

Break up of Bolivia planned by big business interests

Several provinces of Bolivia have announced that they are to break away from the central state in protest against the left wing policies of the country's leader Evo Morales. MIKE GONZALEZ assesses the threat

EVER SINCE Evo Morales was elected to the presidency of Bolivia in late 2005, the country has lived through permanent tensions. It was only to be expected.

Morales was carried to power by a movement that, in the six previous years, had got rid of three presidents in the battle to control Bolivia's natural resources.

The existence of vast gas and oil reserves could have transformed the lives of the two thirds of the population who are still living in poverty—a poverty intensified by the previous decade of neoliberalism.

Morales was elected to bring that potential wealth

back under national control and to build a new kind of state—one in which the indigenous population, such as the Aymara and Quechua speaking communities, would be represented for the first time.

Soon after his inauguration, Morales set up a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution to guarantee those rights and give the government control over the country's natural wealth.

One and a half years later, the assembly had made not a single decision. Instead it had become a battleground.

The strategy of the Bolivian ruling class was to paralyse the assembly, in which government supporters had just short of the two-thirds majority necessary to carry through new legislation.

Delegates from the wealthy eastern provinces walked out in late 2006, after unsuccessfully insisting that every individual article of the new constitution be approved



Evo Morales: elected President in late 2005,

by a two thirds majority.

They have continued to disrupt the process from outside, with demands for greater regional autonomy. They pushed for the country's capital be moved to the city of Sucre, which is in an area controlled by the right.

Then in the state of Santa Cruz—the richest of Bolivia's eastern provinces—the violence increased. Gangs of young thugs roamed the streets and supporters of Morales

were attacked.

Having refused to take part in the assembly, the eastern provinces now demanded autonomy—effectively self-government.

In recent days the real meaning of the autonomy demand has become very clear.

On 14 December, 165 supporters of Morales met in the assembly and approved a new constitution which acknowledged indigenous

rights and legislated for state control over oil and gas.

Meanwhile Santa Cruz and two other eastern states (with one more to join them soon)—the areas where gas, oil, precious woods and soya plantations are located—published their own version of the constitution.

It announced their control over local resources, declared their right to deal with national and international capital, and denied the rights of indigenous peoples.

It is no accident that the current US ambassador to Bolivia had previously overseen the break up of Yugoslavia.

The autonomy demand is a strategy to undermine the Bolivian state and place control of the nation's wealth in the hands of the capitalist groupings who are, for the most part, already linked to multinational capital.

The attack is veiled by an explicit racism that is cynically exploited to divide even

working class organisations, as well as the middle class with its high proportion of recent immigrants.

Morales has said that he will send in the army and police—which are still controlled from the capital La Paz. Santa Cruz has responded by announcing, in its autonomy statute, that it claims the right to raise its own police force. It is possible that there will soon be serious confrontation in the country.

The history of mass struggles of recent years teaches a very clear lesson—it is mass action that will carry through the changes that were hoped for when Evo Morales was elected.

Attempts by Morales in recent months to negotiate with the groups led by Santa Cruz have only encouraged them to attack his government.

It is only when the economic and political power of the capitalists are challenged directly that the new Bolivia can be built.

The return of the film Western



Still from the iconic fifties Western, *High Noon*

LAST YEAR with the release cheek-by-jowl of *3:10 to Yuma*, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* and *No Country for Old Men* saw the resurgence of one of Hollywood's most enduring genre's; the Western. Film critics reviewing the best films of 2007 frequently made reference to the return of the Western.

Although we could argue that the Western never really went away, this outpouring is nevertheless significant.

The Western was and is the quintessential American art form. The era of the American West lasted from about 1850 to 1900, when the United States was expanding at a staggering rate. Migrants from Europe flocked to the American West on the promise of land and a new life.

The Western landscapes are burned into the imagination of movie-goers everywhere: the red rock monoliths of Monument Valley; the jagged, snow-capped peaks of the Teton Range; the treeless expanses of the prairie. It was in this mythic clash between humans and landscapes, with the land giving way at the hands of those who are worthy and able, that defined the drama of the western.

Nineteenth century US popular culture was dominated by dime novels that spread the legendary feats of real life characters such as Kit Carson, Wild Bill Hickok, and Jesse James. Artists such as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, Frederick Remington and Charles Russell captured this world on canvas, emphasising the epic mountain vistas, the brave cav-



Jesse James

alry and noble Indians.

Wild West Shows featuring Indian war dances, stagecoach chases, and authentic frontiersmen (such as Buffalo Bill Cody) packed in audiences and even toured Europe.

The Western's preoccupation of with the struggle of common men may in fact resonate with contemporary audiences, when many in the US feel they live in dark times ruled over by small minds. The Western's myth and rituals have served America well in earlier troubled epochs and it seems that filmmakers and audience continue to be drawn to this genre as it still has something to say about US history that we need to hear.

An important aspect to the allure of the Western was its

very simplicity. As film critic Richard Schickel argues, as "everyone wore a six-shooter, complex moral conflicts could be plausibly resolved in clear, clean violent action".

This authority allowed the West to take on mythical dimensions, to become a place where great legends could be born. These myths and legends were embodied by Western heroes such as Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody, Calamity Jane, Jesse James, and Billy the Kid.

Central to the Western was physical action. All those runaway stagecoaches, Indian raids, bank hold-ups and cattle stampedes allowed the Western to resolve its moral conflicts through violent brawls and gunplay and

re-establishing in the prevailing authority in the closing shots with an exhilarating BANG!

The majority of Western plots emerged from archetypal situations: ranchers vs. farmers (*Shane* and *Man Without a Star*), Indians vs. settlers (*The Searchers* and *Hondo*), and outlaws vs. civilization (*My Darling Clementine* and *High Noon*).

As the Western developed as a genre, directors such as John Ford, Budd Boetticher, Anthony Mann, and Sam Peckinpah used to manipulate the genre use the American West as site to create stories of unsuspected complexities and ironies

For example, in John Ford's *The Searchers* we have much more than a simple quest to find a young girl kidnapped by

Indians. Instead, Ford fashions a tale of a never-ending journey for the story's hero, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) as he slowly realises he can never become part of the civilization he strives to restore.

Anthony Mann's *The Naked Spur*, is more than simply the story of a bounty hunter (Jimmy Stewart) bringing home a body, rather it is we tale than intertwines vengeance and self-destruction.

The myth and legends of the West dominated American popular culture for over half a century in everything from clothes (denim jackets, jeans, and cowboy boots) to children's toys (cap guns, rubber-tipped arrows, and tom toms).

One possible explanation for the dominance of the Western in American popular culture is that as a genre it portrays the moment just before the incorporation of the "frontier" into the administrative, political and, ultimately, ideological systems of the United States. This act of inclusion was supposed to reinvent and create the modern US nation.

In other words, because of the place of the idea of the frontier in American culture, the Western, allegorically, allows the events of a given moment to be justified or challenged by directly or indirectly locating them as part of a quintessential American legacy.

This is why the frontier continues to be the place where the American ethos of the individual can be articulated, explored and, ultimately, contained.

The Assassination of Jesse James

ANDREW DOMINIK'S *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* is a tremendously observed poetic masterpiece about the 1882 murder of legendary outlaw Jesse James. However, Dominik has also fashioned a subtle but nevertheless, acute, political film.

He conceives of Jesse James's killing as a political act in that it was allegedly commissioned, on a nod and a wink, by the state authorities who were humiliated by their failure to catch James.

This is even suggested by the film's title. 'Assassination' is an unusual way of referring to referring to the killing of one criminal by another, tending to reserved for more political motivated killings.

The film is also a powerful commentary on own celebrity obsessed culture in that James was gunned down by an obsessive fan. Robert Ford, we are told, has hero-worshipped Jesse from any early age, and keeps a shoebox full of memorabilia and dime models about the outlaw: "I can't figure

out whether you want to be like me—or to be me", Jesse tells Robert. In a piece of ingenious casting Jesse James is played by own celebrity culture pin-up, Brad Pitt.

In the *Assassination of Jesse James* we see a degree of hero-worship and paranoia more appropriate to own age dominated by the media's ugly assassination of celebrities, the deranged behaviour of damaged souls who hunger for recognition and the media pundits who take malicious pleasure in the downfall.

Hollywood writers take to the picket line

WHAT IF Hollywood held an awards ceremony, and nobody showed up? Greater catastrophe's have, of course, befallen the world, and certainly the world could use a little less of the gaudy, self-congratulation spectacle that takes over Hollywood for the first two months of the year.

But if you thought that it would take nothing short than a Nuclear War (with not even Iraq or 9/11 managing) to derail Hollywood, think again.

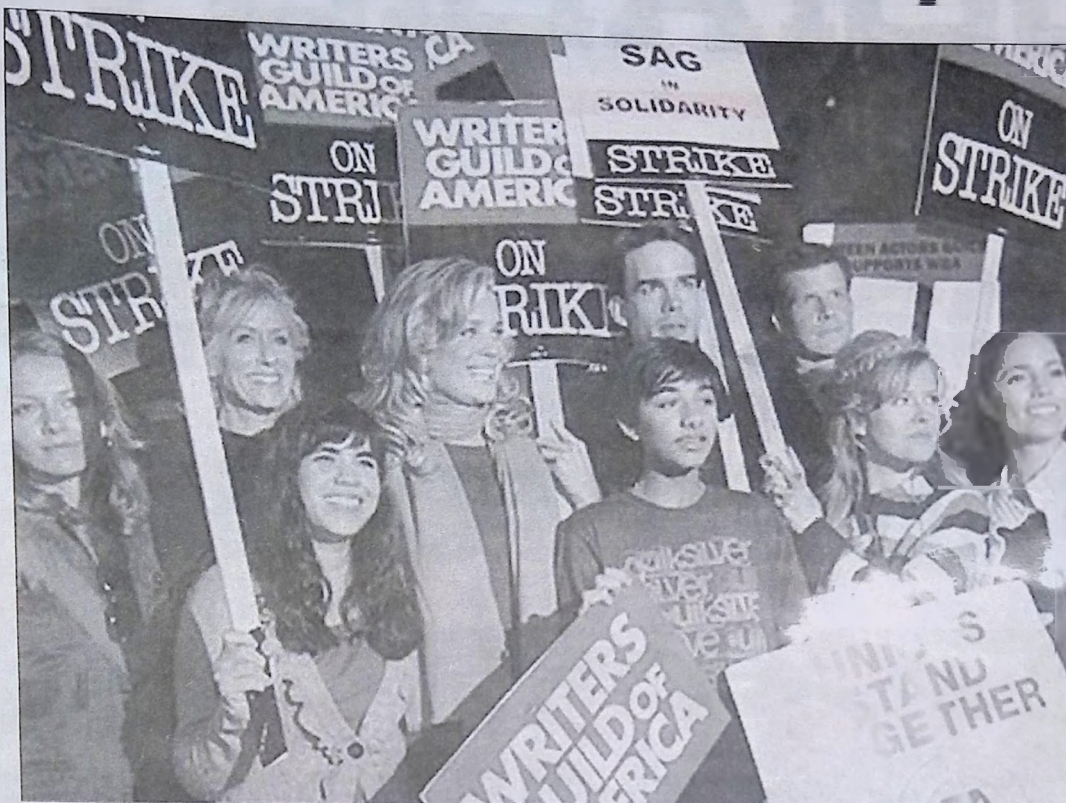
It is looking increasingly like that both the Oscars and the Golden Globes will be closed down, or at the very least seriously disrupted, by the worst industrial dispute to hit Hollywood in two decades.

Hollywood's film and television writers are into the third month of a strike that shows no signs of ending any time soon, and its effects are beginning to hit very hard.

At a union meeting in mid December the Writers Guild membership threw down one of its biggest aces and refused to grant a waiver for the Golden Globes awards show on 13 January. That means that no participation by writers or supporters including actors. (Actors are among the most vocal supporters of the writer's strike) They have also turned down an initial request by the Motion Picture Academy to show movie or television clips at the Oscars in February.

Barring some miracle, the Award ceremonies will be devoid of usual star faces, the fashion industry will have to hang up their diamond encrusted gowns and howl, and the shows themselves, which, even with input from writers, are notoriously dull will have all the allure and glamour of Ploughing Championships.

So what's the strike all about? As the head of the Writers Guild West Coast branch, Patric Verrone, put it: "Writers are engaged in a crucial struggle to achieve a col-



Actors from the set of TV series Ugly Betty join striking writers on the picket line

lective bargaining agreement that will protect their compensation and intellectual property rights now and in the future."

The Writers' Guild of America (WGA), the official union representing writers in the film, TV and new media industries has 12,000 members. Writers receive payments, called residuals, every time a TV show they have written is repeated and they also get a small residual when their work is sold on DVD - currently around 0.3% of each DVD sold.

The WGA wants to renegotiate its contract with the Hollywood studios and TV Networks over

the amount of money they receive from DVD sales. They also want to be compensated for films and TV shows that can be downloaded onto computers, mobile phones and other devices.

The studio bosses are represented by the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) and they are refusing to pay because they claim that digital distribution is still in its infancy and that it is too early to judge how successful it will be.

The also claim that they cannot afford to pay higher royalties for writers on new media products

and that in these uncertain economic times giving into writers would stifle growth at a time of increasing production costs.

But the writers have succeeded in persuading the so-called show-runners - writer-producers who commission, guide and polish scripts - to come out on strike with the rank and file. If the strike continues for much longer it will effectively destroy next autumn's line-up of new television shows.

The studios have already had to give a huge amount of money back to advertisers in October because their audience figures

before the strike - did not live up to expectations. They will have to give back a lot more following what is known as the November "sweeps week", the basis for calculating future advertising rates, was by the start of the walkout.

And the unrest is Hollywood is spreading. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG), the actor's union, contract is up for renewal in June if the writers strike continues for another six months, the two Guilds united together will bring all of Hollywood to a startling shutdown.

"Your fight is our fight," SAG's

president, Alan Rosenberg, told the writers in December. "We are proud to walk shoulder-to-shoulder with you and SAG will be there for as long as it takes."

However, if the strike continues, there will also be tough times ahead for writers. The studios have very deep pockets, more than combined the GNP of several third world countries and can withstand the financial impact of a strike a lot longer than writers can.

In 1988, writers walked out for five months over video residuals, they were forced back to work and gained nothing. Writer's powerlessness is further complicated by the way Hollywood works. Usually, when workers go on strike, they strike against a particular company: airline workers go on strike against Aer Lingus or Ryanair. Writers, on the other hand, are striking against every single major media conglomerate, from Disney, News Corp and Viacom to Time Warner and the rest.

They studio bosses have already suspended standing deals with many writers and have the power to cancel those deals outright if they choose to. The means that the studio bosses now have a rare opportunity to get rid of writers on long-term contracts and free up funds to commission shows that do not depend on unionised writers - the whole genre of reality programming.

While it may be one of the weirder strikes happening in the world today, Hollywood, nevertheless has a proud union tradition and the writer's cause has gained widespread support from unexpected sources such as the Teamsters, the Service Employees International Union, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. They are also supported by writers guilds in Canada, Australia, Britain, Germany, New Zealand, France, Netherlands, Greece, Belgium, Switzerland, and Ireland.

Aretha Franklin: preaching the gospel of liberation

A new collection of rare and previously unreleased recordings by Aretha Franklin are a powerful reminder of how she transformed popular music, writes YURI PRASAD

In 1967, at the high point of the civil rights movement in the US, *Ebony* magazine proclaimed, "This is the summer of 'Retha, Rap, and Revolt'".

'Retha referred to Aretha Franklin, Rap referred to Black Panther leader H Rap Brown, and the revolt was a reference to the wave of riots that were sweeping America's inner cities.

From seemingly out of nowhere Aretha had become the hottest name in soul music, one whose songs and singing style spoke directly to the burgeoning movements for liberation.

Even if privately she was shy and withdrawn, on stage and on record Aretha was their very emblem - a young, strong and confident Black woman.

Yet it had not always been so. In 1960, at the age of 18, Aretha had signed to the Columbia label with a reputation as gospel singer who was now "ready to go secular".

While there she was put

in an artistic straight jacket, recording regular ballads and some jazz standards. A few hits followed, but the music world was heading in a very different direction and Aretha was sidelined.

Everything changed when she signed to Atlantic Records at the end of 1966.

Label boss Jerry Wexler took her to an obscure recording studio in Alabama, called Muscle Shoals.

There she sat at a piano, surrounded by a group of white studio musicians and studio staff, and belted out *I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)* - one of the most momentous takes in the history of black music.

The decision to take Aretha to the South was an attempt to capture the "natural sound" that was coming out of record labels like Stax, in Memphis - a sound that made better use of Aretha's gospel training and her amazing vocal range.

The Southern studios, with their reputation for producing an "authentic" form of soul music, in which musicians and singers were granted a lot of artistic prerogative, were establishing themselves as a rival to the dominance of Detroit's Motown.

You can hear the results on the early demos on this two CD album - *I Never Loved A Man* and *Dr Feelgood*.



Aretha Franklin in the studio in the 1960s

The new freedom Aretha was enjoying allowed her to be true to her own style, as well as her emotions. You can hear it when you listen to her voice soaring in her version of *You're All I Need To Get By*, or the B-side, *Pledging My Love*.

Aretha's years of singing gospel, where the spirit of the music can take the singer on any number of improvised exaltations, where now put to work in some of the most

emotional and believable soul records ever recorded.

And even as she sang lyrics that were typically submissive - like *You Make Me Feel Like A Natural Woman* - Aretha could turn the song into one that places her own emotional and sexual needs as central, making it an anthem for liberation.

Aretha's importance was understood well beyond the US.

In the sleeve notes of the album Wexler writes that Paul McCartney sent him a demo version of the Beatles song *Let It Be*, saying he had written the song for Aretha, and asking her to record it - Aretha was initially unkeen, saying that as she couldn't relate to the lyrics she couldn't sing it.

She did, however, record an intriguing version of Lennon and McCartney's *The Fool On The Hill*, which is present on

the album.

The second CD in this album takes us through the early 1970s, by which time Aretha's "Queen of Soul" crown was beyond doubt.

Yet many of the songs are distinctly less optimistic than those of the sixties, and many, like *Can You Ever Love Again?* deal with irrevocable break up.

It is tempting to see Aretha's work through the lens of her own life stories - being on the receiving end of domestic violence, manipulation and heartbreak - but the songs of the later period are more than that.

As with much soul music, tales of relationship break-ups can also be read as commentaries on a society that repeatedly offers dreams of freedom and equality - but one which cheats and lies.

They reflect the bleak feeling in Black America in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, the jailing of many leaders of the Black Panther Party and the increasing ghettoisation that accompanied the economic recession of the mid-1970s.

Between the years 1967 and 1973 Aretha Franklin was making some of the most vital and innovative music of the age.

Even if you have most of her other recordings, this album is a must.

Pakistan:

US backs military not democracy

Bush not welcome here

ON THE 7th of December, First and Deputy First ministers Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness, paid a visit to the worlds biggest Warmonger George Bush.

The visit was not, as one would have hoped, to ask the President to stop occupying other peoples countries, but to offer their gratitude to Bush's "efforts" at making "peace".

These sickening scenes were part of "the chuckles brothers" whistle stop tour of the US, meeting and greeting big business leaders to convey the message that Northern Ireland was the place for them if they wanted to make some money.

No doubt eyeing a quick buck for his friends, President Bush says he is encouraging American business leaders to take a good look at the economic opportunities in Northern Ireland.

If meeting the world's most hated man isn't bad enough, McGuinness and Paisley invited Bush to join them at an economic conference in the North in 2008. This is utterly unacceptable. George Bush is not welcome in Ireland.

Spokesperson for the Belfast Anti War movement Matt Collins says:

"If Bush does accept this invitation, he can expect a massive mobilization against him"

"The anti war movement will be watching the situation very closely, and are ready to take action in solidarity with the hundred of thousands of Iraqis killed by George Bush".

These elements, clustered around Pakistan's military and security services, were once allies of the US but fell out with the White House during the prolonged occupation of Afghanistan after the US invasion in 2001.

The state of emergency declared at the beginning of November was a desperate attempt to head off opposition to Musharraf's rule.

It was a move that embarrassed the US government - which had hoped for a compromise deal between Musharraf and Bhutto - without managing to pacify the elements sympathetic to the Taliban within the military's own ranks.

Whatever develops now, no political solution based on compromise with US imperialism and its regional allies can offer anything other than more bloodshed and misery.

The real opposition to Musharraf's dictatorship and Bush's war does not lie in these quarters. It is the civil rights movement that rose up across the country this year that offers the best political hope for the people of Pakistan.

That movement has been organised independently of all the corrupt and discredited political parties of Pakistan.



Benazir Bhutto, assassinated in December

By RIAZ AHMED, International Socialists Pakistan

BENAZIR BHUTTO, the former prime minister of Pakistan murder has destabilised a country that was already being torn apart by the forces unleashed by George Bush's "war on terror".

Bhutto had recently returned to Pakistan as part of a US-sponsored plan to shore up the rule of Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's president and former army chief - and a key regional ally of Bush.

Bush was swift to condemn Bhutto's assassination, but many in Pakistan are already pointing the finger of blame at him.

"The military and their American masters have to take some of the blame for this," said Munib Anwar from the Pakistan Lawyers Action Committee. "They brought these terrorists into Pakistan."

Benazir Bhutto is not the first in her family to die a violent death. Her father, former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was hanged by a previous US-supported military dictatorship. Two of her brothers also died in mysterious circumstances.

But imperialism lies at the heart of the brutality of Pakistan's politics. The country has been bathed

in blood ever since it was founded by the British partition of India in 1947.

And the tragic circumstances of Benazir Bhutto's death should not detract from the fact that she had made her peace with imperialism

and was a loud supporter of Bush's murderous "war on terror".

Her radical days were long behind her and many ordinary people in Pakistan rightly saw her as corrupt and reliant on the support of Western powers.

As yet no organisation has claimed responsibility for Bhutto's murder. But suspicions are bound to fall on Islamist elements of Musharraf's administration who are sympathetic to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

10 years after agreement: Peace dividend only for bosses

By SEAN MITCHELL

2008 WILL mark the tenth anniversary of the Belfast Agreement.

It was offered to us as the only alternative to sectarianism and violence of the "Troubles". However as shown recently, with the draft program for government, it and its successor, the St Andrews agreement, have hardly offered a brighter future for working class people across the North.

Since the assembly was formed last May, its underlying agenda has appeared through the cracks of its populist

rhetoric.

The debate over the proposed budget shows this. While thousands of people are crying out for a better health service, more public housing, and well-funded local public amenities, the assembly has other priorities.

It has produced a budget aimed at complying with the demands of big business. Its agenda is one of "financial prudence" in order to reduce their commitment to the North's "over sized public sector".

The budget has been met with outrage from many

sections of the North. Housing campaigners slammed its lack of commitment to social housing.

The North's housing waiting list now stands at over 20,000, which is at its highest level since the 1970's.

Professor Roy McClelland, chair of the Board for Mental Health and Learning Disability (NI), spoke of his outrage that money ring-fenced in the draft government budget for mental health and learning disability, was "derisory".

The budget has however been welcomed by the Confederation of British

Industry (NI) enthused that it would "help create a more competitive environment for business"

The Northern Ireland assembly promised that ordinary people could have their say on the budget in a consultation, which ended on the 4th of January. This "consultation" was significant if only for the lack of people it consulted.

Politicians at Stormont have no interest in listening to ordinary people, knowing that the vast majority of people disagree with their privatization agenda. They only listen when

they are forced. That's why it is the job of everyone to help build resistance to this neo liberal budget wherever it rears its ugly head.

2008 will hear many musings from politicians, keen to pat themselves on the back, about "how far we have come".

We need to remind them of what little they have done for us.

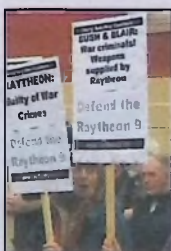
The budget will affect all working class people, giving us an opportunity to create a real alternative, on the ground, to the institutionalised sectarianism of the Belfast agreement



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