

Momentum grows for NO vote Defend democracy and peace

Reject the Lisbon Treaty

Neutrality

THE EU is developing as a military superpower, involving Ireland, for example, in French dominated colonial adventure in Chad.

The Lisbon Treaty copperfastens these developments.

The Treaty gives a legal base to EU 'battle groups' which can be deployed within days to fight 'resource wars' for oil in Africa or the Middle East.

It also gives constitutional support to NATO – a military machine that is controlled by the US Commander in Chief – presently George Bush, and further requires countries to increase their military spending – thus diverting money from public services like healthcare.

The Lisbon Treaty will create a new super-state with new powerful positions of President and Foreign Minister, and a new diplomatic service to push the EU elite's foreign policy and economic agendas.

Democracy

THE ELITES of Europe don't believe in democracy – if they did they would give every citizen of Europe a vote on this treaty.

The Irish elite is obliged by law to have a referendum – not because they're more democratic.

So they set out to deliberately make this treaty unreadable.

It gives the bigger EU states

more voting power in the EU Council.

It gives an unelected EU commission more areas of policy making and enforcement, and does nothing to address the lack of democratic that has turned the EU into a lobby paradise for big business.

The claim that the Charter of Fundamental Rights is a compensation for these defects is entirely false. The Charter gives us no extra legal rights than are presently contained in our national constitution.

Economy

THE TREATY gives the EU Commission the power to make agreements at the World Trade Organisation and explicitly commits them to seek 'uniformity in measures of liberalisation'.

This is code for privatisation of water, health, education and other public services.

The EU is increasingly dominated by large corporations who use its institutions to impose their policies on national governments.

For example, the Lisbon Treaty gives constitutional backing to the creation of an 'open market' free from 'distortions'. 'Distortion' can mean state intervention to protect the welfare of citizens or trade union rights.

The Treaty explicitly forbids any laws that might harmonise standards of health care or other useful services across Europe.

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Augusto Boal on the Theatre of the Oppressed



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Hotel workers fight rip-off



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4-page pull-out: 1968 - Liberation put back on the agenda

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Busting the myths about the food crisis

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Writer Ronan Bennett interviewed

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Large turnout kicks off 'Alternative Parking Road Show'

CLOSE TO hundred people in the Lower Falls area of West Belfast, gathered for the first in a series of anti parking tax meetings taking place across Belfast.

The meeting allowed residents the opportunity to raise their concerns over parking and the proposed Department of Regional Development plans for the area.

Many complained bitterly of the lack of consultation in drawing up these plans while others illuminated the contradictory message emanating from the DRD about how this scheme will be implemented.

Residents unanimously agreed that the "Parking Tax" should be scrapped and a local campaign committee was set up.

There was a strong desire to unite with other afflicted areas, and it was proposed that any action would be coordinated.

Opposition to the proposal was found to be almost unanimous in a door to door survey carried out by activists from People Before Profit in the Barrack Street area of the Lower Falls.

The scheme will mean you will have to pay £40 for an annual permit, per car, to park outside your own door.

Sean Mitchell from People Before Profit said, "If your



friends or relatives want to visit you, they will have to apply for a permit of £12.50 for 25 visits or 50 visits if they are over 65.

The idea that you should have to pay to park outside your own house or to visit your relatives is absolutely ludicrous.

With prices going up, we already have enough bills to

worry about without another being piled on us.

We have enough on our plates, without having to worry about getting our friends or relatives to pay for their annual parking permits to visit us.

It isn't good news for our elderly citizens, whose isolation from loved ones can only increase with the onset

this scheme".

"The problem of parking congestion was never created by residents.

It was created by years of underinvestment in public services and the failure to provide proper subsidized parking facilities as opposed to the overpriced ones we have at the moment.

Residents want streets free of congestion, but we will not be fooled into taking the blame for the problem.

Furthermore, motorists already pay an annual road tax, which is supposed to partly deal with issues like this.

A parking tax on top of this is nothing short of a double tax".

Sean Mitchell, who organised and addressed the meeting said, "This was a fantastic show of unity against the DRD.

Residents have faced this parking scourge for decades and want to put a stop to it.

The only useful thing that has come from this proposal is that it is uniting people who have been suffering in isolation for years.

Connor Murphy claims he needs 50% approval for this to go ahead.

There is no chance of this.

As one resident put it, no matter what they say, we are not paying."

School funding crisis deepens

by DEIRDRE CRONIN

IN GLENVILLE National School in North Cork, school authorities have been forced to convert a toilet into a classroom.

Promised a new school ten years ago, Glenville is one of a host of schools in crisis because of the failure of the government to fund school buildings. Meanwhile areas of new population growth suffer a chronic lack of school places.

The crisis looks set to deepen. According to a recent report from the Central Statistics Office, the primary school population is set to grow

by up to 38% or 172,600 children within the next 13 years.

Neither school buildings nor projected teacher supply will come close to covering this growth in demand.

The government record on class size is just as alarming.

Minister Mary Hanafin, in a blatant breach of a cast iron promise in the Programme for Government, has failed to reduce class size this year despite the fact that a quarter of all pupils in primary school are in classes of greater than thirty.

Up to 140 schools will now lose teachers and a further 200 will be unable to appoint new staff.

Fianna Fail dominated governments have become serial promise breakers in this area.

As the Irish National Teachers Organisation has pointed out a clear commitment was given in 2002 that class sizes for children under nine would be reduced to less than twenty.

Today there are actually less children in classes of twenty than 6 years ago.

A funding crisis also plagues the system, with the recent capitation

increase eaten away by the EU demand that schools pay water charges.

As the economy falters Minister Hanafin and her colleagues are becoming more adamant that the Irish education will not only continue to be run on a shoestring budget, but will face a restriction in funding.

Mass rallies on class size are planned by the INTO for the new school year.

People across the country should prepare to take to the streets next Autumn and demand a decent public education system at all levels.

HSE forcing young families into homelessness

A NUMBER of young mothers in the Dun Laoghaire area were made homeless when the local Community Welfare Officer decided to discontinue their rent allowance payments because the rent increases imposed on them by their landlords took them beyond the rent thresholds set by the HSE for such payments.

Richard Boyd Barrett of the People Before Profit Alliance said: "This is an absolutely outrageous situation.

"The authorities and government departments charged with looking after the welfare of families on low incomes are actually forcing those same people into homelessness.

This situation results from the fact that the rent caps being set by the HSE and Department of Family and Social Affairs are completely unrealistic in comparison to the rents being charged by private landlords in areas like Dun Laoghaire.

For example, a single mother with two children requiring a two-bedroom home will not receive rent allowance if the rent exceeds €1200 per month.

Or a couple with one child also requiring a two-bed home will not receive rent allowance if the rent exceeds a mere €1000 per month.

It is virtually impossible to find 2-bedroom accommodation for anything less than €14-1500 in Dun Laoghaire or many parts of Dublin these days.

Furthermore, a huge amount of the accommodation that is advertised states explicitly that the landlords will not in any event accept tenants that receive rent allowance.

Even worse, as in the cases I have recently encountered, even where people had accommodation with rents on or below these



Richard Boyd Barrett

caps and were receiving rent allowance, they have now been cut off because of the decision of their landlords to raise the rent beyond the thresholds allowed by the HSE.

The result is that young women with a number of small children are now in completely unsuitable homeless accommodation.

In one case a young mother with three children who has just given birth to a fourth child in the last week is holed up in homeless accommodation that is far too small and where the heating is not even working.

The HSE should discontinue this policy immediately.

It should also be made illegal for landlords to discriminate against rent allowance recipients.

However, the bigger question of rapidly increasing the availability of social housing must also be tackled straightaway.

Rent allowance is a stop-gap but ultimately amounts to pouring taxpayers money into the pockets of private landlords for over-priced accommodation.

The only way to address the desperate situation of homelessness faced by so many people and families is for the government and local authorities to rapidly increase the provision of social housing.

To do this would also cost far less to the taxpayer than the current system, which is simply enriching private landlords.

Pharmacists put their profits before people

By NORA BOYLE, Complimentary Health Therapist

THERE IS a total breakdown in trust between the Irish Pharmacy Union and the Health Service Executive.

As they look set to battle it out in court over cuts to payments for community drugs and medical card schemes both sides are playing with the lives of vulnerable medical card patients.

Pay cuts to pharmacists under community drugs

and medical card schemes have been described as 'breach of contract' by Michael Guckian President of the Irish Pharmacy Union.

The Health Service Executive says pharmacies must give three months notice if they want to terminate contracts to supply drugs to medical card patients.

So far the Health Service Executive has refused to admit how many pharmacies are threatening to stop supplying drugs on May

1st but is estimated that between 360 and 500 pharmacists have issued notice to the HSE that they will refuse medical card patients their medicine in response to HSE cutbacks.

This in turn the HSE say would be breach of contract.

Meanwhile neither side bothers to inform medical card holders where their medicine can be obtained after May 1st.

Instead of planning how to deal with this impending crisis in drug distribution the HSE is threatening

pharmacists with court injunctions.

If pharmacies go through with their threats to discontinue dispensing medicine the worst affected will be people living in rural areas on the western seaboard.

People living on disability benefit cannot afford to pay pharmacists for expensive medicines and then apply to the HSE at a later date for a refund.

Travelling far distances to alternative pharmacies is too much to expect of people especially in

worst-hit areas such as Donegal where 40 out of 52 pharmacists have issued notice that they plan to withdraw from community drug and medical card schemes.

The sheer inhumanity of turning the elderly and the chronically ill away just because they have medical cards is a new low in the ongoing crisis in healthcare provision in this country.

Pharmacists are scaremongering sick people with big posters in the windows of their shops which state that medic-

card holders are under threat from drug cuts and they should write to Mary Harney and their local TD's to demand re-instatement of pharmacists pay.

These shock tactics against the sick, elderly and disabled is no way to go about resolving the conflict.

Instead of protecting their profits the Irish Pharmacy Union should call for an end to all medical card apartheid and join the fight for a fabulous, one-tier health system.

EXTEND ABORTION RIGHTS TO NORTHERN IRELAND

by GORETTI HORGAN

THE WESTMINSTER parliament will be debating Irish women's lives from 12th May, as the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is used to put down amendments on abortion, including "it is hoped" one on extending the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland.

Every major trade union in the North supports the extension of the Act.

This is not, as anti-abortionists suggest, because the policy has been forced on them by British union members.

Almost all passed support for a woman's right to choose at their Irish regional conference. In any case, the North's largest union, the Northern Ireland Public Sector Alliance (NIPSA) operates only in the North and it supports extension of the 1967 Act.

It is time for all trade unionists, especially anyone in UNITE or UNISON, to get onto their union and tell it to ensure that those Labour MPs who are sponsored by their union are told to vote in support of extending the Act.

Meanwhile, Alliance for Choice has been getting a good response at stalls in city centres. It is asking people to send a postcard, produced by the Family Planning Association, to Gordon Brown, calling on him to extend the Act.

Left students break through

by MICHAEL COLLINS

THE NATIONAL Union of Students/ Union of Students Ireland conference was held in Ballymena on 18th April. The conference saw the highest attendance in NUS/USI history.

On the agenda were issues such as the Iraq war, tuition fees and women's liberation.

Throughout the conference there was vibrant debate about the strategy and approach of NUS/USI and how it could engage with more students.

Several of the delegates who attended from Queens and Ulster University were from People Before Profit and argued that through campaigning and grassroots activity we could transform the NUS/USI into an organisation that really stands up for students.

PBP and SWSS member Matt Collins, who was elected as the new Welfare Officer commented, "We managed to get three members elected onto the executive committee of NUS/USI which is a massive breakthrough for the left in universities in the North."

"Next year we will look to transform the NUS/USI so that it takes up the real issues which affect students like housing costs, tuition fees and student debt."

The election results were a great result for the left who have never had anyone elected onto the executive since its inception in 1972.

Some of the conference motions kicked off debate amongst the students.

A motion proposing that NUS/USI affiliate to the Anti War Movement and call for troops to pull out of Iraq was hotly disputed.

Members of the Ulster Unionist Party were strongly

opposed to the motion and argued the legitimacy of the war and stressed the need for troops to stay in Iraq describing the Stop the War Coalition as an "extremist organisation".

However the left responded with three fantastic interventions on the debate.

People who had been involved in the Belfast Anti-War Movement spoke of the devastation that the U.S and British government had inflicted on Iraq and pointed to the fact that billions had

been spent on the war while the government claim that they have no money for education.

Hypocrisy

The facts on the ground and the hypocrisy Gordon Browns government managed to sway the vote of conference despite the UUP and Queens Students Union Officers voting against it.

"NUS/USI now affiliates itself to the Antiwar movement which is great news for us," said Matt who convenes the BAWM committee.

Another highlight of the conference was the sub conference on women which for the first time in its history was attended by male delegates.

A special applause was even given at the end of their contribution to the discussion about women's liberation in the 21st century.

Gery Carroll, VP Jordans-town elect said, "Its been great meeting students from all over the country to discuss these issues and talk about what we can do in the year ahead."

Motions calling on NUS/USI to campaign for free education and an end to tuition fees were passed unanimously so in the coming year NUS/USI will be looking to step up the campaign against top up fees.

With the right strategy for the year ahead NUS/USI has the potential to politicise a whole new layer of students and become an organisation that is really effective when it comes to taking up student issues and defending young people against oncoming attacks.

MAY DAY IN BELFAST



Over a thousand Trade Unionist and campaigners, from across the North, descended on The Arts College in Belfast city for the annual May Day march and celebrations. A lively procession of bands and floats were joined by banners from trade unions such as NIPSA, UNITE and UNISON. A strong Raytheon 9 support contingent, of around 40 people was organised. Supporters held aloft pictures of victims of weapons produced by the arms manufacturer. An anti water charges contingent was also present

Campaign for SIPTU General Secretary hots up

by MARNIE HOLBOROW

NEARLY ONE quarter of a million of SIPTU members are eligible to vote for the two candidates: Joe Flynn, the existing General Secretary or his challenger, Kieran Allen, President of the Education branch.

In a statement, Kieran Allen said, "The dramatic 9 percent rise in food prices over the last year has caused real hardship for working people. Calls for a pay freeze or even a reduction in the minimum wage are totally unacceptable. They can only form part of a government or employer strategy to reduce expectations.

"However, the vast majority of workers want pay increases that match the rise in inflation. The incoming Taoiseach Brian Cowen will find little sympathy for his call to accept increases below the rate of inflation.

"The Celtic Tiger created a new rich who enjoyed unprecedented profits for more than a decade. This is the first group who will need to make sacrifices in the coming recession which has been caused by speculation in the financial markets.

"Tens of thousands of workers feel that the unions have been weakened by their embrace of social partnership.

"The coming election gives members a straight forward choice. They can continue with a strategy that prizes a close relationship with the government and IBEC. Or they can seek a return to independent, strong trade unionism that fights enthusiastically for its members."

Incinerator condemned

by NIAL SMYTH

UP TO 50 local people from Ringsend, Irishtown and Sandymount made their opposition heard to the proposed Dublin Incinerator at the EPA Oral Hearing on Tuesday evening April 22nd.

Many expressed their disappointment that they had elected John Gormley to stop the Incinerator yet now as Minister for Environment it appeared he is not using his powers to halt the planned mass-burn incinerator.

Speaking at the Oral Hearing Rory Heame, member of Combined Residents Against the Incinerator and the People Before Profit Alliance (Dublin South East) said: "John Gormley must act

now to stop the incinerator. The EPA Hearing has revealed the mass-burn incinerator will release dangerous dioxins across the city, affect traffic and will compromise the ability to reach recycling and waste reduction targets. The Minister could issue a Ministerial Order to order Dublin City Council to abandon its plans for the incinerator. This would result in DCC being sued by the private company who is planned to run the incinerator. Cowan, however the local community believes that would be a small price to pay to protect the health and environment of the community and for John Gormley to honour his pre-election promises.

HSE defeated on respite cuts

by PEADAR O'GRADY

A LARGE crowd of people from Ballyfermot, Clondalkin and Palmerstown took part in a Victory protest today to mark the re-instatement of respite beds in Cherry Orchard Hospital. Carers, their families, patients and the wider community learned from the HSE yesterday that intended cuts to the roll over respite service had been rescinded.

The protest went ahead to ensure that the HSE do not renege on their commitment to respite care and to protest at the cuts in respite in Leopardstown and Baggot



Cherry Orchard hospital victory march.

Street. The protest also carried messages for Mary Harney and the HSE to demand a free public health service for all.

According to one of the organisers, Brid Smith of

the People Before Profit Alliance "This is a major victory for People Power. All credit for this U turn by the HSE is due to the carers, their families and the wider community.

Attention was drawn to these cuts by the national media and sparked huge anger among the local community. All local community groups, churches and politicians

got behind the campaign and have shown that threw unity, determination and people power we can achieve success in the face of inhuman and outrageous cuts by the HSE."

"This campaign will not go away and will be watching closely the progress in Cherry Orchard Hospital to ensure that no cuts are implemented in any of the services. We will also be linking in with protests against the respite cuts in Leopardstown and Baggot Street Hospitals and the national campaign organised by the trade union movement for a free, public health service for all."

US dockers strike against war

TENS OF thousands of dock workers across the west coast of the US struck on 1 May in protest at the wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The workers, members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), organised action in almost 30

ports across the coast from Washington to San Diego and paralysed billions of dollars worth of cargo.

ILWU members have joined anti-war protests before but this was the first large-scale work stoppage in opposition to the war. It coincided with

demonstrations of tens of thousands of people in cities across the US to mark May Day.

The action also had solidarity from across the world - including from Iraq where dock workers closed down the port of Basra for several hours in support of the US strike.

BT workers fight for union recognition

WORKERS AT British Telecom (BT) in the south of Ireland are fighting to have their union, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) recognized.

BT are discriminating between workers in the Republic and the North, they recognize the CWU in the North but refuse to enter into collective negotiations with workers in the union in

the South.

This is despite BT operating its business on a 32-county basis.

A CWU union spokesperson said, "The CWU cannot accept that it is fair or equitable that a multinational like British Telecom can run its business on an all-island basis and treat a large group of its staff this way - by denying them a basic human

right. It beggars belief that in this day and age a company can so brazenly treat an entire group of its own staff within a single business operation like second class citizens.

"This is not a situation that the Union can tolerate any longer and the CWU is now compelled to move our campaign for equal treatment for all British Telecom Ireland

workers to another level".

Workers protested outside the BT corporate headquarters in Dublin in April in support of staff having the right to be represented by their union of choice.

BT operates in 170 countries around the world and refuses to recognize unions in all but two, US and Britain.

Why you should VOTE NO

THE IRISH are the only people in Europe who will get to vote on the Lisbon Treaty. None of the other 490 million Europeans will get to have a say in this important treaty.

The Treaty is almost identical to the EU Constitution that was rejected by the populations of France and Holland in 2005. Even Bertie Ahern has admitted this when he said that '90 percent of the EU constitution is still there'.

The government are claiming that Lisbon amounts to nothing more than a series of 'house-keeping changes' and that it is not really important.

But this Treaty, if passed, will dictate 80 percent of all future legislation throughout Europe, allowing for increased privatisation, more military 'battle groups', less spending on healthcare and more on warfare and even less democracy.

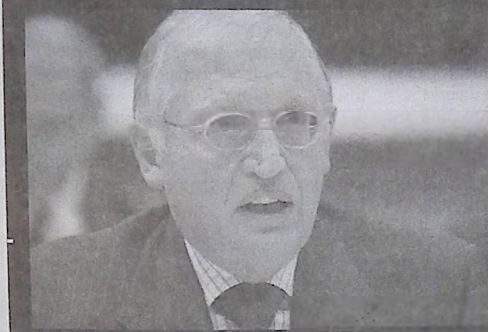
And this Treaty, which will dictate so much of our future, is not even comprehensible. Lisbon is a series of amendments to two existing treaties. It adds 145 pages of amendments plus 132 more pages of 12 protocols and 51 declarations, all legally binding and superseding every law of all 27 EU member states.

We are told this Treaty is about giving the people of Europe more democracy. However, the European Parliament, the only elected EU body, is given only marginally more power to co-decide on legislation, and it still cannot initiate legislation. This power remains with the all-powerful and unelected European Commission.

Lisbon includes a new article that clearly states that the goal of the EU is now 'the integration of all countries into the world economy through the suppression of barriers to international trade'. This will allow for corporate penetration into all aspects of social and economic life in Europe and the developing world.

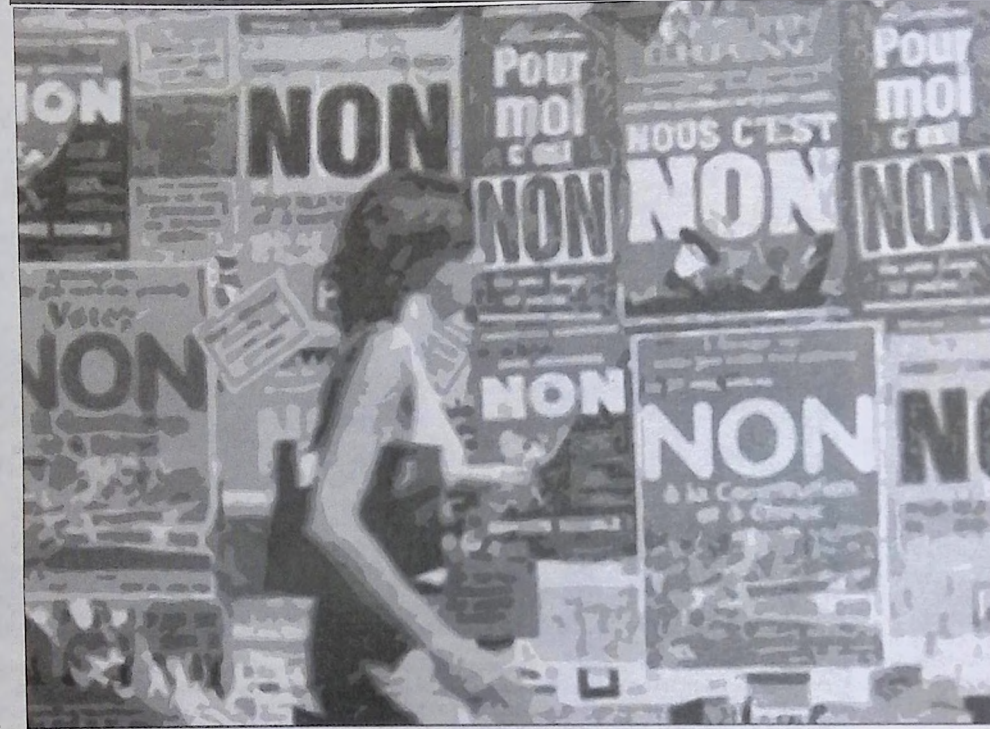
It defines 'barriers' as any form of government regulation of foreign investment or the protection of essential social services.

It also allows for a fast-track system whereby the Commission can conduct negotiations with agencies such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to promote 'the achievement of uniformity



'We must not give into blackmail'

Vice-President of the Commission, Gunter Verheugen, shows his respect for democracy after French and Dutch voters reject the EU Constitution in 2005.



in measures of liberalisation'

This is all simply code for more privatisation. Remember how the EU was invoked to justify the government forcing our schools and hospitals to pay huge water charges.

The market, mentioned 63 times in Lisbon, remains the supreme good and competition, mentioned on 25 occasions, is the dominate rule.

Lisbon also requires all member states to increase their military spend-

ing: Article 27-3 states that 'Member states shall undertake progressively to improve their military capabilities'. There is also a legal requirement, forcing member states to make troops available for EU battle groups.

Security and defence policy is understood almost primarily within the framework of NATO which Lisbon states 'remains the foundation of the collective defence of its members.'

In deciding how to vote on the

Lisbon Treaty, we need to ask serious questions about the future of Ireland and about the future Europe.

Do we want a corporate dominated, military Europe? Or do we want to fight for a social, democratic Europe that supports public services and puts the interests of people before big business?

If the answer is yes to the second question, then we must VOTE NO to the Lisbon Treaty.

Leaked documents reveal government's real agenda

TWO RECENTLY leaked documents make very clear the government's, and indeed the EU's, agenda to keep any real debate on the substance of the Lisbon treaty off the table.

A leaked email from a senior Irish civil servant to the British government revealed how the government has hatched an elaborate plan to deceive Irish voters. The email showed how the government are planning a deliberate strategy of mis information to ensure that Irish voters vote yes to Lisbon. Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dermot Ahern was given a personal assurance that the European Commission will 'tone down or delay' any EU announcements 'that might be unhelpful'.

The email also revealed how worried the government are about the military aspects of the Treaty and that the upcoming WTO talks which will focus on 'trade' or the privatisation of public services will turn voters against Lisbon.

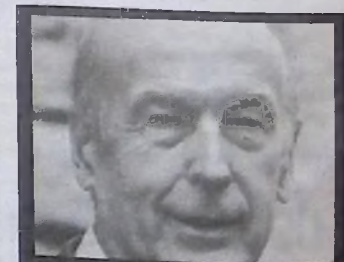
Secondly, a copy of a letter sent by Jo Leiman MEP and Chair of Committee on Constitutional Affairs was leaked to VoteNo.ie

The letter makes clear that every politically sensitive discussion within EU institutions regarding the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty is to be stopped or done in secrecy until the referendum in Ireland has taken place.

The letter concludes: "It would therefore appear highly advisable that any document concerning the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon which addresses politically sensitive matters be examined only when it becomes sufficiently clear that the Treaty will enter into force."

Both of these documents prove what No campaigners across Europe have been arguing for months; that the elites of Europe hold nothing but contempt for the democratic rights of the people of Europe.

The EU and the Irish government are terrified that Irish voters will follow the French and Dutch people and reject the Lisbon Treaty and they are willing to do whatever it takes to ensure it is passed even if that means deliberately concealing information from voters.



"Public opinion will be led to adopt, without knowing it, the proposals that we dare not present to them directly... All the earlier proposals will be in the new text, but it will be hidden and disguised in some way."

- Giscard d'Estaing, Le Monde, 14 June 2007

A Campaign of fear and lies

Kieran Allen, one of the editors of the Voteno.ie appeared before a Dail Committee of Yes supporting TDs and Senators recently and accused them of trying to "frighten and bore" people into voting yes.

IRELAND'S LEADING political parties are conducting the debate on Lisbon in an underhand way. Instead of engaging with the detail of the treaty, they are trying to frighten and bore people in the hope of carrying the vote.

The Irish political elite want to avoid any type of informed debate. They have refused to provide voters with a free copy of the Lisbon Treaty, only giving a summary that deliberately obscures the more controversial aspects of the treaty.

During the referendum on the EU constitution in France, copies were freely available in the post offices. As a result, turnout was over 70 percent and an informed citizenry decided to vote no.

Here in Ireland the government are using three main sorts of arguments all of which are either

erroneous, irrelevant or marginal. In particular they are trying to scare people into voting yes by playing on people's fears of an economic downturn.

Government Ministers, such as Dick Roche are claiming that a no vote would damage Ireland's reputation and scare away foreign investment.

Yet there is absolutely no evidence for this. US foreign companies do not base their investment strategies on how the people vote in EU referenda.

The case of France clearly illustrates the fallacy of this argument. The inflow of foreign direct investment to France shot up from \$32.6bn (£20.8bn) in 2004 to \$81 (£51.6bn) in 2005 when the French voted no and also to \$81bn (£51.6bn) in 2006.

Yes campaigners also argue that

the Lisbon Treaty is necessary to "streamline" the workings of an expanded Europe. But this ignores how the EU Commission itself has acknowledged that enlargement has not hindered decision-making in the EU.

The EU Commission has publicly said that the accession of 10 new members in 2004 and of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 has not slowed down decision making: EU institutions continue to function and new members of the European Parliament play an active role in its political groups.

In the Yes camp, the Labour Party in particular, are keen to ignore the content of the Lisbon Treaty and focus on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, claiming that it adds to the rights of Irish citizens.

However, this is to draw

attention to the packaging rather than substance of the Treaty.

The Charter provides no extra rights because Article 6 of Lisbon states that "the provisions of the Charter do not extend in any way the competencies of the Union as defined by the Treaties".

While the government and its cheerleaders like Peter Sutherland, continue to insist that the Lisbon Treaty will make no real difference to Ireland or the EU they are unable to explain why 271 pages of amendments are needed to make so little change.

In reality, the Lisbon Treaty brings major changes in the promotion of a neo-liberal economic agenda of privatisation; in the militarisation of Europe, and in transferring more competencies to the EU rather than individual states.

SAY WHY WE SHOULD VOTE NO TO THE LISBON TREATY

to the Lisbon Treaty

WE CAN WIN THIS BATTLE

Green Party member Kieran Cunnane from Galway:

I AM extremely concerned that a recent booklet which has come through my door from the Department of foreign Affairs is a completely one-sided representation of the treaty which omits any of the criticisms of the treaty.

Specifically, there is no mention of the official endorsement it gives to the European Defence Agency, something very few Irish Citizens are aware of, nor of its compelling of countries to expand their military spending. It also gives no mention of the Euratom treaty.

It also gives no mention of the neo-liberal economic model of so-called "free and fair" trade with endorsement of "balanced economic growth" and a "highly competitive social market economy". These are not the only omissions.

Ireland's citizens have a right to this information. The referendum commission's website does not appear to have very much of this information either, so to date there is almost no balanced debate being provided for our citizens.

As the Government is obliged to spend equal amounts of money promoting both sides of the argument or none at all, I feel this booklet is in blatant disregard of the McKenna judgment.

I would also like to state that as a member of the Green Party (who have officially taken a stance of promoting neither a YES or NO vote), I am appalled that the Government in which my party is an active participant sees fit to send out such a document as a Government document.

REPORT:

Trade unionist and Lisbon

DETTE MCLOUGHLIN, socialist and trade unionist from Galway, addressed the recent MANDATE delegate conference about the forthcoming referendum on the Lisbon Treaty.

Although many delegates had heard of the Treaty, very few actually had knowledge of its content and how the treaty would affect them. While people can write, phone or e-mail the government for their own copies of the treaty, or even download the document, the audience were aghast when they heard of its complex wording and length of text that makes it almost unreadable to the layperson.

The lack of democracy in only allowing Irish citizens to vote on the Lisbon Treaty astonished many, and a number of delegates asked for information leaflets to give out at work to enable workmates to understand what the treaty entails.

The policy areas of privatisation and democracy were touched on as they had already featured in motions put before the conference. Militarism and environmental issues were also of concern, although it was the Charter of Fundamental Rights that was particularly discussed. Upon examining the charter, no additional legal rights are given than already acquired, and it falls short of human rights declared by the UN. The union members were particularly angry that it did not give the right of Trade Union recognition.

Delegates unanimously voted for the MANDATE executive to, as urgently as possible, provide members with as much information as practical, to arrange debates within the union at all levels, influence ICTU to do the same, and call for an ICTU Special Delegate conference to democratically determine a position on the Lisbon Treaty.



Organising on the ground defeated the referendum in France last time and we can do it here

WHAT MUST be particularly worrying for the Yes side, is that they have begun to lose the argument once the details of the treaty have become known.

Their strategy up to now has been to try to frighten people, bore them with banalities and tell them how they should be grateful to Europe.

This 'Frighten and Bore' strategy was designed to keep the focus away from the actual articles in the Lisbon Treaty.

But through websites like Voteno.ie and countless local meetings, the NO side are succeeding in telling people about the real implications of the treaty.

This is all the more worrying for the political elite because they have been able to dominate the airwaves up to now.

They delayed calling the referendum for as long as possible, in order to avoid rules about balance.

Now that the date is officially set for the referendum, the NO side will be able to demand equal airtime and will have an even greater opportunity to present their case.

Organise for a No vote

Against this background Socialist Worker is making an urgent appeal to all readers and supporters, indeed to everyone who wants to

reject the Lisbon Treaty to get involved now.

In the remaining weeks we need to double indeed treble the number of local meetings we are organising and to get out on the streets distributing literature.

You only need one or two individuals to organise a meeting in your local community.

For example, 60 people turned up to a Voteno.ie meeting in the small village of Kilmore Quay in Wexford after a group of young people put a few posters around their community.

Another individual has organised another Voteno.ie meeting in Newcastle West in Limerick this week.

Voteno.ie can provide you with a speaker, a standard poster and some leaflets to get you started.

You simply need to text our hotline number or e-mail us with your contact details and we will get in touch. We will give you simple advice and backup on how to organise.

We are on track to win but only if our campaign intensifies. In the coming weeks we will face the power of big money as they spend millions of euro on posters to dominate our streets.

Our weapons will be the commitment and enthusiasm of many people who have learnt to say NO.

Get involved in the No Campaign

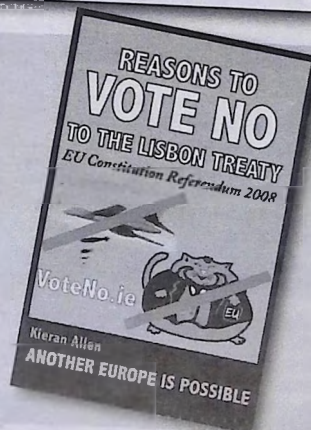
For more information on the Lisbon Treaty visit www.voteno.ie

To get involved text VoteNo to 087 6347648

To volunteer to campaign / distribute leaflets / organise meetings e mail: info@voteno.ie

Get all the low down on the Lisbon Treaty

€5 plus postage. From Bookmarks PO Box 1648 Dublin 8 or visit voteno.ie





Around 300 supporters joined Plaza workers for a May Day protest around Ballymun. Photo: Rita Cahill

Ballymun Plaza Hotel workers fight rip-off

By KEVIN WINGFIELD
Ballymun People Before Profit

WORKERS FROM the Ballymun Plaza Hotel have been fighting to recover their jobs and wages owed since the hotel was closed in April.

The hotel, owned by building giant Bennett Construction, opened in 2006. It was operated by a company whose directors operated the Tallaght Plaza Hotel, and operated an anti-union policy. When the majority of workers joined SIPTU the operators refused to negotiate with the union.

Workers were paid barely over the legal minimum and failed to receive promised pay increases, Sunday bonus and other entitlements. In April a shop steward was sacked on the spot for intervening in a case of bullying.

Workers representatives met with their union organiser and representatives of People Before Profit and planned a protest for the following day against the victimisation.

However, just a few hours before that protest was due to take place, the hotel was closed, staff and guests put out by Bennett Construction subsidiary BBT. They were put out without wages and holiday pay owed.

Local people joined the workers in an immediate demonstration demanding their jobs back and their money owed.

Bennetts have washed their hands of responsibility, despite the fact that they have been favoured by Ballymun Regeneration with lucrative contracts for the rebuilding of Ballymun and tax incentives for the building of the hotel and private apartment complex of which it is a part.

The workers and their union have demanded that Bennetts write into any new lease for new operators the requirement to re-hire the workers with wages and conditions respected. They have refused to do this.

The operators of the hotel are linked through interlocking directorships with the Tallaght Plaza. Indeed the workers were paid from Tallaght. But the operators of Tallaght Plaza (many of the same directors) are hiding behind legal loopholes and refuse to pay the workers what they are owed.

As a result, workers and their supporters have mounted noisy protests outside the Tallaght Plaza and leafleted staff and customers.

But the workers' spirit is high. On May Day around three hundred local people joined the workers on a protest march through Ballymun. And they continue to mount lightning protests at Tallaght Plaza.

The operators, their shadowy affiliates and Bennetts' construction obviously hoped



Plaza workers tell their story

THERESA, a waitress at the Plaza, told *Socialist Worker*, "We were keen to get the union in. I have been working at the Plaza for 19 months. It was a disgrace what they did to us considering all that we did to make the hotel a success.

"We, the staff, not the management, got the place up and running. We canvassed for customers, delivered leaflets about what the hotel offered. "It was a lovely place to work with the other staff. It was a big disgrace the way we were treated."

JOANNE worked as a Housekeeping Assistant: "There was a very good atmosphere among the workers, they were a good crowd to work with.

"It was a terrible what Bennetts did. They should have given 30 days

notice that they were closing the place down. Instead they showed no consideration for the staff or guests.

"When I started there was already the union in place. I am very glad I joined now.

"You need the union. I've worked in the hotel industry in maybe six or eight places since I left school and in all of them there was no union. When you phone up for jobs, they ask you if you are with the union and if you say yes, that's the end of it, they don't want to know.

"I was delighted by the turn out on the protest on May Day from the local community. I had delivered leaflets round and was beginning to despair, but when I saw the three hundred or so I was really cheered up."

THOMAS worked as Front Hall Porter: "I started on 24th August 2006, on the day the hotel opened. I liked it there, it was good craic and we were one big family.

"Of course the pay was shite - we didn't get a pay rise in all the time we were there.

"Since the Plaza was shut things are very hard - I have a four month old child and we have not got our wages.

"About four months ago we began getting the union in. The union is your only protection, they've been a great help.

"I was very, very happy with the May Day march with the support we got from the community. I'm hopeful that there will be a good outcome to all of this."

the workers would just get lost, but the workers have shown they will not go without a fight.

As we went to press Travel Lodge was taking over the hotel. If they do not agree

against this company must take place

The fight goes on. A fundraising social has been organised for Saturday 10th May in the Sentanta GAA Club beside Ballymun library and other financial contribution will help the workers con-

tinue the fight.

Send donations, messages of support, etc to: Ballymun Plaza Workers, c/o Miriam Hamilton, SIPTU, Liberty Hall, Dublin 2

Contact Ballymun People Before Profit on 086-3074060 or 087-9208626

Regeneration of Crookery

MORE THAN a decade ago, Ballymunners were promised a new dawn. The unemployment black-spot with its run down flats complex was to be rebuilt with an industrial park, quality homes and jobs for local people. Dublin City Council set up Ballymun Regeneration Ltd (BRL) to take charge of the project.

But local people have been bitterly disappointed by the reality.

Despite huge tax breaks and mega profits from the rebuilding project, the promised apprenticeships and quality employment has not materialised.

Instead it has been a field day for chancers and chissellers.

Four years ago Turkish workers were brought in by GAMA Construction who won a contract from BRL on one of the building projects.

Workers were paid a fraction of the legal minimum and much of their wages were diverted to a bank account in Holland. When the workers fought back and struck, they were cut off from food in their compound in Ballymun.

The local community rallied round and brought food and joined them on demonstrations. BRL didn't lift a finger to help - instead they sold Gama a large part of local Poppintree park for a private development.

Despite a bonanza for developers building private apartment complexes, the total stock of public housing in Ballymun has not been increased, leaving the acute housing shortage unmitigated.

Indeed a ministerial order was put through excluding local people from receiving rent allowance in the private apartments.

Bennetts were given a prime site in Ballymun on which to build the hotel and the private apartments. And they have a fall-back that they can convert these units to apartments if the profits from the hotel are not enough to satisfy them.

Despite the infusion of nearly €1 billion in public money, council officials, BRL and the developers saw the location of Ballymun as a prime spot for privatisation and profit and the disadvantaged community of Ballymun as a nuisance to be given as little as possible.

MAY 68: FORTY YEARS ON



Forty years ago, the 'events' of May '68 in France changed the left political landscape.

In this article, originally published in 1978, the late **Dave Widgery** brilliantly captures the excitement and significance of those days.

Dave Widgery, doctor and author - was a leading member of the International Socialists in Britain, the forerunner of the Socialist Workers Party.

Vietnam resistance inspires a generation

Ten years for Pandora (May 1978)

THERE ARE times, remarkable times, which clear up in weeks the disorders of centuries. 1968 was such a time - of the audible end of eras, of a collision of turning points, of new possibility.

1968 was the critical year in the Vietnamese three-decade-long war for independence, the year of the most important popular movement in Eastern Europe since 1956, the biggest ever general strike in European history and street battles in Derry which took the Irish question out of the impasse set by the settlement of 1921.

All the social authorities which had seemed eternal were unsettled as '68's semaphore signalled from the ditches of Da Nang to the corridors of Nanterre, passed on to the car factories of Billancourt and Le Mans to the squares of Bratislava and Prague, then onto the bloody pavements of Mexico City and Chicago, Belfast and Grosvenor Square.

1968 acts as a marker of the end of the long boom and the re-emergence of socialism to the left of the Communist Parties, and, slightly later, revolutionary feminism as active, organised political forces.



Suddenly the post-war double-act of a Communist world which denied communism and a Free World which wasn't free looked the farce it was. The Emperors - De Gaulle, Lyndon Johnson, Brezhnev - had no clothes.

The powers-that-be were scared of us, their once obedient servants.

The year began politically in central Vietnam with the Tet offensive, which can now be seen as a tour de force of strategic warfare.

The Pentagon generals had in the mid-60s embarked on the most hideous phase of their war, an attempt literally to annihilate the rural societies in which the Viet Cong had their political roots.

Search and destroy operations were carried out with routine brutality, peasants suspected of disloyalty were herded into concentration camps called strategic hamlets, rebellious regions became free fire zones for artillery, computerised B-52 runs and helicopter gun-boats.

The clouds were seeded, the

crops dried up or flooded, children scorched. Babies are to this day born twisted and deformed from that aerial poisoning.

The Vietnamese resistance was to be obliterated by the technology of Coca Cola and Cape Kennedy.

The solidarity movement in the West which sought to awake the blunted moral responses to this macabrely efficient war of annihilation was itself marked by an appalling sense of ineffectuality. Inevitably we cast the Vietnamese as victims - how could they not be overwhelmed by the most powerful empire in human history?

But, after the initial feint at Khe Sanh and the swift and peaceful capture of Hue on 31 January 1968, it became clear that the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam had launched a sustained and general urban assault, opening prisons, overrunning arsenals and bases, knocking out US equipment on the ground, revealing simultaneously the inertia of the South Vietnamese puppet forces and the extent of their own underground civilian support.

The NLF struck at 34 out of 44 provincial capitals, 64 district capitals, destroyed over 1,800 aircraft and bombed the US Embassy and airstrip in the heart of Saigon.



France takes to the streets

CLUSTERED ROUND the radio news from Hue, deciphering the only nearly reliable reports, in *Le Monde*, we suddenly grew brave.

In Paris on 21 February 1968 a mass student demonstration took down the street signs and renamed the Latin Quarter 'The Heroic Vietnam Quarter'.

The spirit of Hue had arrived in Europe. Here its partisans were not the patient, proud peasants, but the avenging angels of various 'isms. The student *enragés* were fuelled, not with national pride, but with social disrespect, political derision a desiring for revolution and a proclivity for madness as political method. The children of affluence, the workers in the brain factories, were restive, too.

Time bombs, buried and ticking away since the global settlement of 1945, were going off, crashing against the conformity and stupidity of higher education, the remorseless banality of the media, the repression of real love and free sensuality.

The French student movement was originally founded by Resistance veterans and shaped in the bitter struggle against France's colonial war in Algeria.

But its political reflexes were now sharpened by *groupuscules* – the nuclei, groups, gangs and small parties of the far left. For it was (they who pressed the agitation born in Nanterre forward to Paris, then built the movement to re-open the Sorbonne and remove the police from the university.

Carefully, imaginatively, they pushed their demands to the point the authorities would make their mistake and unleash the repression that caused the explosion.

On the night of 11 May 50,000 college and school students and young workers met a massive force of riot police with their gas masks, grim overcoats and black rubber clubs.

Barricades were thrown together out of parked cars, grills, railings and comradely trees. With the advice of passing building



workers, the students learned how to lever up the cobble stones. 'Under the cobbles, the beach' they scrawled on the walls.

In the Rue Gay Lussac the fighting went on for five hours, hours of gasping lungs, scorched throats, cracked rib cages, blood-stained trousers. It was so bad taxi drivers and concierges, no friends of the *enragés*, hauled the injured away from the vengeful black mosquito swarms of CRS.

Radio reporters coughed and wept into their tape recorders till their worried producers switched over to soft music. The world's TV showed the cliché streets of Parisian tourism, now illuminated with fire bombs, misty with tear gas, serenaded with shrieks.

Two days after the night of the barricades, ten million French workers went on strike. At last the oldest of political reflexes – solidarity – had operated. The Sorbonne was re-opened and occupied as a centre of revolutionary debate, confession and confusion.

In the audience were the most adventurous young workers: '(We) rediscovered there in the Sorbonne the historic idea of the revolutionary traditions of the working class and started to talk the language of revolution.'

And in that process Marxism recovered its own meaning from under the shrouds of Stalinism, social democracy and small-group sectarianism. At the entrance to the Odeon amphitheatre is written: 'Run forward comrade, the old world is behind you'.

Bread and roses

In the factories the young workers were getting the message, both of Hue and Rue Gay Lussac. At Nantes, Sud-Aviation workers occupied, shutting the manager up in his plush office.

Then Renault-Cleon was occupied. *La grève sauvage* spread through cars, aircraft and engineering to mines, shipping and transport. Strippers, footballers and TV announcers made their demands.

MAY 68: FORTY YEARS ON

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the streets

Liberation back on the

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CALMLY A nation went on strike, not just for bread but for roses. The workers at the occupied Berliet factory re-arranged the lettering outside, the front gate to read 'Liberté'.

The boom had exploded in its makers' face. The bureaucracies of the reformist left were stuck in the clichés and sloth of the past.

Finally it was the Communist Party that De Gaulle had to depend on to get people back to work...

Indeed, one of the most retchworthy aspects of the anniversary will be the professors of King Street's amnesiac attempts to hail May as some little known by-way on the British road to socialism.

For it was the East bloc as much as Western capitalism which felt May's challenge to the stilted, finished, stale mutilations of Marxism we had been offered for thirty years.

The reform policy of Dubcek and the thousands of political flowers which had begun to blossom from it were destroyed by the Kremlin as casually and as completely as a boot might crush a daffodil head.

Imagination takes power

And in Chicago the whole world watched while Mayor Daly's police thugs brutally restored order outside the Democratic Convention in another episode in that profound crisis in American bourgeois democracy which was to reach its climax over Watergate.

It was as if an international political pageant was being acted out – the ideas we had treasured in pamphlets and argued about in tiny pub back rooms were now roaming, alive, three dimensional. Marxism had come out of the cold.

The simple lessons of 1968 were simple to read off and important to re-emphasise.

The working class, written off by dumb sociology and depressive 'marxism', remained, when the chips were down, decisive.



TY YEARS ON



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Liberation back on the agenda

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Conversely, the Communist Parties and the bloc to which they owed their loyalty were revealed as a central element in the status quo.

And, most practically, those still stranded on the astral planes of May in the misery of June had to realise that out of the flash of euphoria must emerge the politics and the organisation of the long haul, the preparations for the fire next time.

The business of engaging socialist politics with the working-class reality from which it derives its meaning, without compromising the clarity of our political and personal goals in those useful cages of routine and meetings and like machinery, this has been the stuff of our lives for the last decade.

But to me it's more fascinating to trace the ideas which winged from May's Pandora's Box without us orthodox politicians knowing quite where they might alight.

For one of the most valuable, but easily forgettable, legacies of May and any genuine revolutionary upsurge is that sense of personal possibility, a sudden enlargement of the apertures of the political imagination.

One of the particular emphases of May, but present in every revolutionary movement and in the theories of Marx, Trotsky, Reich and Brecht, is the realisation that challenges within culture and against political, educational and sexual hierarchies are necessary, essential, inherent parts of taking political power.

It's, of course, tempting to overstate the progress that can be made in the cultural and sexual spheres.

This is habitual among intellectuals, who mistake their mental and sexual battles with bourgeois ideology for the real engagements. But understanding is doubly important now the right is on the offensive again, attempting to regain the social and cultural ground we surged across almost by accident in the aftermath of May.

MAY 68: FORTY YEARS ON

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A LA NORMALE...

The rebirth of the revolutionary left

IT IS important for our morale that we stand rightly appraised of our real strengths and appreciate the much enlarged social presence the revolutionary left has unofficially won over the last ten years, especially as the liberal British bourgeoisie, unlike the French, still seeks, hopelessly, to ignore us out of existence.

Likewise, culturally it has taken a full decade to see even part of the fruit from the Maytree's seeds. But again and again, one can trace back the most artistically daring initiatives, in theatre, film and design especially, and now music above all, to the catalyst of '68, which opened up the struggle, by art and media workers, for political control of the means of communication.

Pandora was a woman

It's quite silly to see this expansion of the socialist cultural menu as estranged from political power.

The bourgeoisie certainly doesn't and yet is impaled on its own inability to produce any artistically worthwhile alternative.

And in another still more broken line of descent, it is not unreasonable to trail back the first stirrings of modern feminism to the joyous if utterly male-defined subjectivity of May.

'One must remember', writes Guy Hocquenghen, 'before May, France was the most Victorian of countries, the most puritan,

the most reactionary on sexual questions'.

Yet by April 1971, 343 women publicly declared themselves to be among the million French women forced each year to have illegal abortions. And by its emergence, women's liberation, which, like the student movement, is a quite distinctive response, in form as well as demands, to modern forms of oppression, alters the very definitions on which political struggle takes place.

But what of our organisational standing in the workplace, where the great majority of men and women still spend a great deal of their time and where they are still most potently organised? For it was the building of a permanent organised presence there for the full range of revolutionary ideas that most of us saw as the future after '68.

Had this report been five years after '68 rather than a decade, it might be easy to sound very optimistic. For, paradoxically, it was in Britain, traditionally but inaccurately known as a revolutionary backwater, that the far left made a real impact on trade unionism.

For here we are not sealed off from the factories by an organised and industrially effective Communist Party apparatus but are rather sucked into a unified social-democratic union structure which already possesses a strong

tradition of independent rank-and-file organisation to which the ideas of revolutionary trade unionism articulate well.

With all due modesty, International Socialist's political perspectives proved highly influential on the British far left. The gusto of May fed directly into an upward trajectory of class militancy.

Perfunctory and insufficiently daring

Our ideas of a new vigour in wage militancy, of industrial action over 'political' rather than 'economic' issues (an unreal distinction but one beloved of social-democratic thought), the tactics of work-in and factory occupation, the spreading of organised solidarity movements, the framing of demands which develop working-class political power, the extension of union organisation into traditionally middle-class jobs whose actual jobs were increasingly proletarianised, all these pressed forward.

Indeed, in the industrial sense, the May events were one incident on the sharply rising curve of struggle which was to climax in our '68, that remarkable year of 1972, of the miners' strike, Pentonville and the builders' national dispute, when it almost seemed we were pressing against the limits of capitalist power.

And with us pressing round the

world was a synchronised wave of working-class revolt from the Norwegian docks to the Zambian copper mines, from the Indian train drivers to the Nigerian bank clerks, a revolt which in 1974 had smashed asunder the established power structures in Thailand, Ethiopia and Portugal.

Perhaps more than even we had anticipated it was the urban working class who moved, in the Third, Second and First Worlds, in Bangkok, the Baltic ports and Birmingham.

And if the 1960s had been the decade in which black America spoke out, the 1970s, stamped by the blinding courage of Soweto, hearing the roar of Africa and the Caribbean's townships and cities.

Yet, only four years on from the high-point of 1974, such an optimism needs to be qualified.

The system we face constantly changes itself in response to us. Already it is more centralised, more vicious, better armed ... look again at Lisbon, Bangkok, the Ogaden. A photo of the massacre at Thammasat University now hangs over my desk in the place of warning once occupied by a **Comment** front page 'Allende; Left Unity Brings Results'.

Across Europe in these last four dog years, it has been clear that capitalism has begun in earnest to raise its level of productivity in a

new way, by a state organised restructuring of industry, executed by social-democratic trade unionism. The social cost is the permanent but unannounced end to the main features of post-war capitalism - full employment, rising real wealth, the welfare state. Instead there is quite stark poverty, even if it is disguised by the giro and the rented TV.

In this world, I can feel no sentimental jollity about what we glimpsed in May, at the very pinnacle of the biggest boom in world history. When the immediate task is as basic as grouping and linking those who will take a stand against racism of the most open character, the slogans of the Odeon, 'I take my desires as reality because I believe in the reality of my desires' sound, well, distant.

To those who stayed with revolutionary politics while the going was good and have found it now convenient to get out, good riddance.

To those comrades who are taking a rest, in pain, or disagreement, or from exhaustion, we'll see you again. To those who have stayed, a salute ... we ain't seen nothing yet.

Like the reggae singer says, 'we're going to mash down Babylon, one of these days', and we'll have May in our hearts when we do.

From Socialist Review, No.2, pp.19-22.

BUSTING MYTHS ABOUT THE FOOD CRISIS



Rice fields in Bangladesh face destruction from soil erosion (main). Food protests in Mexico and West Bengal (below)



By SADIE ROBINSON

ROCKETING PRICE rises are threatening to plunge tens of millions around the world into hunger and food insecurity.

The prices of maize, wheat, soya beans and rice – staple foods for the majority of the world's population – have more than doubled in the past few years.

Josette Sheeran, executive director of the United Nations World Food Programme, warned earlier this month, "This is leading to a new face of hunger in the world, what we call the newly hungry. These are people who have money, but have been priced out of being able to buy food."

Many explanations have been put forward for the crisis – population growth, changing consumption patterns and climate change are some of the most popular.

But in reality it is the domination of food production by global capitalism that has reshaped agriculture and food markets and led to the crisis.

Some right wing economists argue that the current crisis is an aberration that will be corrected through the market. But starvation and food crises are inbuilt into capitalism – a system that is based on profit not need.

While millions face hunger and poverty, a tiny minority are making big profits from spiralling food prices.

Agribusiness giant Cargill – the second biggest private company in the world and a major grain trader – earlier this month announced that its quarterly profits have surged up 86 percent.

Of course the "free market" has never been entirely free – it relies on government tariffs, subsidies and economic policies.

Many governments around the world, terrified at the prospect of civil unrest, have banned exports of staple foods or looked for other ways of protecting domestic supplies.

This may give them a temporary breathing space, but it also causes sudden shortages and panics in international markets that can further inflate prices.

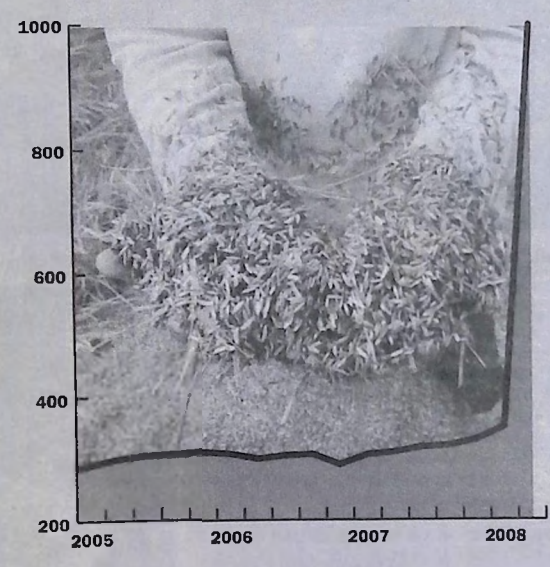
There is growing resistance to soaring food prices – and world leaders are right to be afraid of it. Price hikes have provoked strikes, protests and riots over the past few months in countries including Bangladesh, Burkino Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Yemen, Indonesia, Morocco, Senegal, Mauritania and Guinea (Conakry).

Thousands of workers are taking up the fight for the right to food. In Egypt the issue of bread prices was at the heart of recent strikes that shook the government, while in Bangladesh garment workers struck last week over the price of rice.

Surely one of the greatest indictments of the system is that capitalism can produce more than enough food but it lets people starve. Socialist Worker exposes five of the most common myths

RICE PRICES SOAR

Thai B grade rice (dollars per ton)



that surround the food crisis.

ary doctrine". He was right.

1 THERE ARE TOO MANY PEOPLE TO FEED

Many people argue that a growing global population explains the current food crisis.

This idea assumes that we have a limited pot of resources to go around. It doesn't recognise that people have the capacity to transform production methods to increase output.

The argument harks back to Thomas Malthus, an 18th century economist who claimed that increased wealth would lead to an unsustainable growth in population that would outstrip the resources available.

In fact food production has grown faster than population – global agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite the population of the world increasing.

Enough wheat, rice and other grains are already produced to provide every person in the world with 3,500 calories a day – before foods such as meat, vegetables, nuts or beans are taken into account.

Britain's department of health says that the average person needs about 2,500 calories a day to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The reality is that food production is marked by overproduction, not underproduction. People starve not because there is a lack of food but because they cannot afford to buy it.

The Russian revolutionary Lenin called Malthus's theory a "reaction-

2 ECONOMIC GROWTH IN CHINA IS TO BLAME

A favourite theme in the mainstream media is that growing wealth in China is changing consumption patterns and pushing up prices.

But even with dramatic economic changes in China, the consumption per head of the Chinese population is still around three times less than that of the US and Britain.

And while it's true that China's meat and dairy consumption has increased, China is still a net exporter of many foods – including rice, wheat and corn.

China's increasing imports of food have been pushed by multinationals across the world eager to open up new markets for their produce and grab more profits.

3 THE MARKET CAN SOLVE THE PROBLEM

The price of many foodstuffs is already determined through international markets. The economic crisis has inflated prices by pushing investors to put their money into food, which is seen as a "safe" alternative to other forms of financial speculation. Similarly, stockbrokers are now even placing bets on future water prices.

Speculation drives up food prices – and as prices rise, this in turn encourages more speculation. It also encourages stockpiling by food traders – who buy food purely to hold on to it and sell it

at a higher price.

Several long-term trends have contributed to rising food prices. All of them result from the way that global capitalism impacts on the food industry.

Poorer countries have seen huge changes in land use over the past 30 years – resulting in less food being produced for domestic consumption.

Pressure from the US government and world bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank has been fundamental in reshaping the agriculture of poorer countries.

This pressure has been formalised through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) – rebranded Poverty Reduction Strategies – agreements that poorer countries sign up to in order to receive aid or loans.

Key elements of the agreements include cutting public spending, increasing privatisation, and opening up the economy to global markets – with a devastating impact on agriculture.

In Senegal, for example, the government signed up to an SAP in 1986. Government programmes to support farmers were eliminated. Spending cuts and trade liberalisation meant that farmers could not compete with cheap food imports.

The effect was a decrease in the production of basic food crops for local consumption and a turn towards exports. By 1990 a third of the population was categorised as hungry – by 1992, that had risen to 40 percent.

Such policies reduce the ability of people in poorer countries to produce their own food and increase dependence on the global food industry. Over time this pushes up the average price of food.

Another factor pushing up prices is the rush to invest in biofuels – which divert food crops such as corn and wheat to be used for fuel. The US, the world's largest corn exporter, is expected to use nearly a third of its entire crop next year for biofuels.

Governments have also allowed food stocks to fall to an all-time low. In poorer countries, the IMF has explicitly discouraged governments from building up food stocks, arguing that this interferes with the "free market".

Some governments have been forced to sell their stocks in order to repay growing debts.

4 IT IS ALL THE FAULT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a serious problem that impacts on agriculture – particularly in the Global South.

Although climate change in some areas has brought chaotic weather that damaged food crops, climate change alone does not lead to poverty or hunger.

The problem lies in the way that climate change – and the resulting impact on food – is dealt with. Many poor

countries do not have the infrastructure to deal with climate change.

It is estimated that Bangladesh, for example, would need to spend £2 billion to build embankments, cyclone shelters, roads and other infrastructure needed to deal with the effects of climate change.

Yet ten million poor people in Bangladesh face the devastation of flooding every year because the investment hasn't been made.

Blaming climate change for the food crisis ignores the fact that we live in a world divided by class – rich people in countries that have seen crops destroyed by floods or droughts will still have plenty to eat.

It also lets governments off the hook. Climate change does not make hunger inevitable – but it is another urgent issue that world leaders are failing to deal with.

5 GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS ARE THE ANSWER

Genetically modified (GM) crops are sometimes put forward as the solution to world hunger. GM crops are modified in ways that make them resistant to disease, changes in climate or insects and as a result can produce higher yields.

But the introduction of GM foods has not ended hunger – it has increased inequality.

It has allowed multinational biotechnology companies to increase their control over global food production and intensified the dependence of poor countries on richer ones.

New research by the University of Kansas has shown that genetic modification cuts the productivity of crops, undermining repeated claims that a switch to the controversial technology is needed to solve the growing world food crisis.

The study – carried out over the past three years in the US grain belt – has found that GM soya produces about 10 percent less food than its conventional equivalent, contradicting assertions by advocates of the technology that it increases yields.

There are also many serious question marks over the safety of GM foods.

The promotion of GM foods uses similar arguments to those used in the so-called "Green Revolution" of the 1960s and 1970s.

The Green Revolution developed varieties of seeds and crops that could produce higher yields. It was promoted in India as a way of staving off famine and dealing with hunger.

Yet today 233 million Indians are undernourished and malnutrition has increased throughout the 1990s.

Food production can grow at the same time as hunger – because hunger today is a result of how food production is organised, not the amount of food produced.

EDITORIAL

NO campaign can win Lisbon vote

Recent opinion polls show that the NO side is gaining momentum and could defeat the government on the Lisbon Treaty. The Yes side has dropped 8 points to 35% while the No side has increased 7 points to 31%.

This shows that the more people hear and read about the treaty the more the vast majority are rejecting it. The government is deliberately making it hard for people to hear discussions on the content of the treaty and has started a fear campaign to try to scare people into voting Yes. Despite this the No side is gaining.

Every socialist needs to throw themselves into the campaign on the Lisbon Treaty over the next four weeks. If there isn't a NO meeting happening in your area, organise one this week - speakers are available from voteNO.ie

Is the economic crisis over?

Many economic commentators are claiming that the sub-prime crisis is now behind us and that the system has survived. The reality is that most banks are quietly passing the cost of the crisis on to borrowers through interest rate increases and making it harder to get loans and mortgages.

Behind the scenes a mad system of financial speculation has been untouched. Instead the speculators have been rewarded with unlimited funds from central banks to bail them out. This is money that could have gone to public services like education and healthcare that is instead going to save the rich. Money is easy to come by for war or to save the skins of rich bankers but never for the social good.

Behind this banking crisis is the deeper crisis of world capitalism. The low returns on investment in the last 40 years, what Karl Marx called the 'rate of profit', meant corporations invested less in new factories and instead gambled more on the stock exchange and pushed cheap loans on people to buy up all the goods they produced. But fewer factories means fewer workers with wages to buy all the products and caused what Marx called a 'crisis of overproduction'.

This crisis of investment and profits is what's behind the current economic turmoil and has been a featured of capitalism since the end of the 1960s boom. The only solution being offered today is to create a new financial 'bubble' that will eventually burst too. Instead we need to return to Marx and get rid of the whole crazy system.

Palestine: 60 years of violent oppression by Israel

Sixty years ago this month the state of Israel was founded through the violent theft of historic Palestine.

Zionist militias killed thousands of Palestinians and drove 750,000 of them from their homes - an event known to Palestinians as the Nakba or catastrophe.

Ever since then the Palestinian people have faced exclusion, oppression, mass displacement and poverty.

Israel has used its military might to support the interests of Western imperialism against any Arab regime that has challenged them.

The Palestinians continue to bravely resist as the Israelis keep up the siege of Gaza and the building of illegal settlements in the West Bank. Their cause has rightly become a rallying cry against injustice.

This resistance is inspirational, but on its own it is not enough to free Palestine. The revolt by the working class in Egypt, the Arab world's most powerful state, shows the potential to challenge the dictatorial and pro-West Arab regimes from below.

It shows the power that exists in the region to challenge Israel and imperialism, and liberate the Palestinians.

COMMENT

The left's death by compromise in Italy



Rifondazione Comunista: At the start of this decade Italy was the bright star of the European left: Below: Silvio Berlusconi

By CHRIS BAMBERY, Editor of the British Socialist Worker

THE RETURN of right winger Silvio Berlusconi to office in Italy is bad enough. The total elimination of the radical left from parliament verges on the disastrous.

For the first time since 1945 there will be no communists in the Italian parliament. This is being put forward as further evidence that socialism is doomed.

At the start of this decade Italy was the bright star of the European left.

The G8 protests in Genoa in 2001, the European Social Forum in Florence and a demonstration of over three million in Rome against the Iraq war in February 2003 acted as a spur for the left and the movement for global justice and peace. Rifondazione Comunista, the radical party at the centre of those events, has some 80,000 members.

Yet the protests failed to unseat Berlusconi's previous administration and Rifondazione moved to join a coalition with the centre left.

The leadership of Rifondazione argued that if Berlusconi won the 2006 election it would represent a fundamental threat to democracy and that an alliance with

those who espoused free market policies was needed to stop him. In 2006 this coalition squeezed into office. Rather than offer critical support, Rifondazione, the smaller Italian Communist Party and the Greens joined the new government.

This centre left government failed to deliver. People's hopes of the new government were not great but they did not expect it to preside over a fall in wages, a mushrooming of precarious employment (no contracts, no rights) and higher taxes.

The state of the Italian economy is highlighted by the bankruptcy of the Alitalia state airline. Because the slim majority relied on single votes in parliament, the radical left found itself under immense pressure to loyally vote to keep the centre left in office.

The administration had to deliver on its promise to withdraw troops from Iraq - but then sent them into Afghanistan and Lebanon.

The most visible symbol of Italy's woes was the piles of rubbish rotting on the streets of Naples. The environment minister responsible for the refuse crisis was a member of the Greens and is now under investigation for accepting gifts from companies involved in removing



Italian Communists, the Greens and Rifondazione got 3,800,000 votes. In this election their combined vote collapsed to 1,000,000 - down from just over 10 percent to 3.5 percent. To gain seats in parliament you have to obtain more than 4 percent of the total vote.

In the debate that followed the leadership of Rifondazione proposed ending the party and submerging it within an ongoing Rainbow Alliance. It was defeated by 98 votes to 70. The whole matter will now be discussed at a national congress in July.

There is still a large left in Italy and there are strikes and protests. But one thing is clear - the decision to join a free market government was a mistake that must never be repeated.

In all of this there is a hard lesson and warning for those who echo the mantra that we have to 'work inside the system' and ally ourselves with pro-war, neoliberal parties and figures of the centre left in order to get change. These are common phrases you hear in Ireland from Green Party and Sinn Fein members.

By shackling itself to the right the radical left loses its rationale for existence and its supporters stay at home or look elsewhere. The only winners are the right.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

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

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

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

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

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

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

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

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

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

working class.

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

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

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

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

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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

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

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

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

Join the Socialists

Fill in the form and send to
SWP PO Box 1648 Dublin 8

Name.....

Address.....

Email.....

Phone.....



INTERNATIONAL

Rising struggle aids German left

ASPEAKER from Die Linke, Germany's new leftwing party will be speaking at the Irish Anti War Movement conference in May.

May will also see Die Linke's first party conference after a meteoric rise in recent years.

Stefan Bornost is a member of Die Linke and the editor of the Marx21 magazine www.marx21.de writes here for Socialist Worker.

CIVIL WAR is raging in the SPD, the German Labour Party, following the successes of the radical left Die Linke party in recent elections.

The crisis has grown to such an extent that a recent opinion poll put the SPD at 22 percent, with Die Linke at 14 percent.

There are now growing splits between the right and left inside the SPD – with the right openly attacking party leader Kurt Beck and demanding he retract his candidacy for chancellor in the general election scheduled for 2009.

Cooperation

Beck had tacked the rhetoric of the SPD sharply to the left in an attempt to thwart the growth of Die Linke, while at the same time ruling out any cooperation with it.

But this strategy has failed and now the truce between the left and right in the SPD has broken down.

This is because the bosses are exerting pressure on conservatives and the SPD alike to attack the welfare state in the face of a looming US recession. So far the subprime crisis has cost German taxpayers 20 billion euros in bank

bailouts. All experts agree that this is merely the tip of the iceberg.

There is now a chance that Die Linke will get more votes than the SPD in a number of state elections (East and West) in 2009.

The success of Die Linke has intensified the debates inside the new party about its future course.

A background of rising struggle has strengthened the hand of those in Die Linke who want to build it as a working class party that bases itself inside the movements.

Looden grip

They also see the chance to loosen the grip of the SPD on the trade union movement – thus making an overdue revitalisation of the workers' movement possible.

But those within Die Linke who orientate mainly on joining coalition governments with the SPD are worried by its meltdown because they see the chances of coalition dwindling away.

They are also worried that the hard oppositionist stance that Oskar Lafontaine and many party activists in the west are taking could be a barrier to an agreement with the SPD.

Lafontaine has never ruled out joining a government with the SPD, but he has put down minimum conditions, such as the withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan, an end to privatisation, the scrapping of the Hartz IV unemployment laws and the reduction of the retirement age from 67 to 65.

Attempts to water down these conditions have so far failed. Die Linke is set to begin its first party conference on 23 May.

Hopefully Germany's new spirit of resistance will inspire the debates there.



Maoists celebrating their victory in Nepal

Maoist win creates a storm in Nepal

After ten years of fighting a guerilla war, Nepal's Maoists have been elected to government. Yuri Prasad asks if their radicalism will survive

THE VICTORY of the Maoist communists in Nepal, who won almost half of the seats in Nepal's constituent assembly elections has rocked the country.

For more than ten years the Maoists have fought a guerrilla war against the Royal Nepalese Army, and the monarchy and landlords that it protected.

The scale of the Maoist's victory is a blow to the US's policy in the region.

Both the US and Britain helped arm the Royal Nepalese Army and the US state department has described the CPN-M as a "terrorist organisation".

In 2005 King Gyanendra dismissed the elected Nepalese government in order to take direct charge of the fight against the

insurgents – then believed to be in control of 80 percent of the countryside.

A year later a general strike and uprising – in which the Maoists played the central role – faced down massive repression and forced the king into a humiliating climbdown.

Parliament was recalled, King Gyanendra's powers strictly curtailed and elections called. In return the CPN-M agreed to put down its guns and return to being a legal party.

The newly elected government's first task will be to draw up a new constitution. It is possible that this will see the monarchy abolished altogether.

Yet amid the celebrations on the streets of the capital

Kathmandu there are also worries about the future.

Some commentators are predicting that the Maoists in power will be far less radical than their rhetoric would lead many to believe.

Baburam Bhattarai, who is seen as the CPN-M's deputy leader and a likely candidate to be prime minister, told a press conference last week, "Our immediate agenda is not to build socialism, but to build a strong economic foundation... to develop industrial capitalism, to abolish all remnants of feudalism."

Bhattarai said that the main challenge would be to prevent "reactionary forces" from creating instability, and meeting economic

growth expectations.

He said, "There will be full scope for the private sector and nothing will be nationalised or socialised. There is no reason to panic."

Nevertheless millions of poor people in south Asia, who face a daily battle for survival, will be cheered by the Maoist victory, believing it to be a chance to redistribute land from the wealthy and create decent jobs, housing, health and education services.

They will be hoping that Bhattarai's statement is merely an attempt to calm the nerves of the US and Indian governments, and that the Maoists remain committed to radical social change.

Only time will tell if their hopes will be realised.

PARAGUAY

Victory for left bishop

THE ELECTION of Fernando Lugo last weekend as president of Paraguay has shaken the country's elite and unseated the longest ruling party in the world.

The candidate for the ruling Colorado party – an elitist and corrupt party that has ruled Paraguay since 1947 – conceded defeat after results from 92 percent of polling stations showed Lugo in the lead by 10 percent.

Lugo was a Catholic bishop in San Pedro – a poor region in the north of Paraguay – until he was forced to resign his position in 2005 after supporting land invasions by landless workers and their families.

During the election, Lugo called for measures to reduce the stark inequality between rich and poor, for land reform and to renegotiate a hydroelectric treaty with Brazil that was signed in secret in 1973 by the military



Fernando Lugo

regimes ruling the two countries at the time.

Lugo has made a point, however, of distancing himself from radical presidents Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia.

Paraguay has seen an agricultural boom over the past four years, making it the fourth largest global exporter of soya beans.

Yet the vast majority of Paraguayans have seen no benefit from this wealth and many landless workers are fighting for the right to land.

The election is a clear sign of a wider mood for change in the country.

ENGLAND

Left vote squeezed



Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone

THE LEFT'S ability to make an impact in the London elections was hampered by the closely fought battle between Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone.

While the media gave little attention to anyone apart from the two main candidates, many left voters were scared into voting Labour out of fear of a Tory victory.

The split in Respect damaged the left as a whole. It created confusion both in the campaign and at the

ballot box, with both Left List and Respect appearing on voting papers.

Outside London left candidates picked up some creditable results, in Preston polling 37 percent and in Sheffield polling 23 percent. Left List candidates won 15 percent in both Cambridge and Bolton, and polling 13 percent in Manchester.

The best results came in wards where socialists have lead grass roots campaigns, showing that consistent work is reflected at the ballot box.

EGYPT:

Mubarak's concessions lead to more resistance

THE REPRESSION at Mahalla al-Kubra's textile mills in Egypt has not dampened the wave of protests and strikes.

The government of Hosni Mubarak, a key US ally in the region, offered Mahalla workers a bonus of 30 days' pay in an effort to defuse the resistance.

But this has backfired as the bonus – described by the workers as a "bribe" – has set a new benchmark for workers across the country.

Textile workers at Wabariyat Sammanoud occupied their factory demanding parity with Mahalla workers. Children joined the factory occupation – which was led by the 750 women who make up the majority of its 1,300 workforce. The occupation won after a week.

A similar occupation took place at the Mansoura Espana



Hosni Mubarak

Garments Company after new owners refused to honour an agreement forged during an earlier strike.

Meanwhile in the desert oasis of Bahariya, north west of the capital Cairo, over 5,000 demonstrators braved tear gas to protest at attacks on local authorities. The government backed down following the protests.

A campaign launched by doctors for a living wage has now spread to dentists. The wave of protests and strikes is the biggest in over 50 years.

For latest news and analysis on the situation in Egypt go to www.arabawy.org

Irish writer Ronan Bennett Interviewed: 'What, in 2007-8, could be more important than writing about Iraq?'



Ronan Bennett at a book signing in Dresden last year

RONAN BENNETT, political writer, addressed a meeting for Galway Alliance Against War (GAAW) during April.

Bennett was born in Ireland, and in 1974 he was convicted by one of the notorious juryless "Diplock courts" for the murder of a RUC officer and sent to Long Kesh prison. However, the conviction was overturned in 1975.

He was arrested again in 1978 under suspicion of handling explosives, held in detention until acquitted the following year.

GAAW screened Bennett's docu-drama series "10 Days to War".

This series of 8 drama shorts about the lead up to the Iraq war was aired by the BBC in the run up to the 5th anniversary of the Invasion of Iraq.

He spoke to Dette Mc Loughlin of SWP Galway about himself, his work and his politics.

Q: What motivated you to engage in the "10 Days to War" project?

RB: I got a call from producer, Hilary Norrish, to say that the BBC wanted to make a series of eight short films to mark the fifth anniversary of the Iraq war.

I went in to meet her and Colin Barr, the executive producer of the series, and they asked if I'd be interested in writing two or three of them.

Of course I was interested. But I told them that even though time was short I wanted to do all eight films. It was a dream commission for me and I wasn't going to let it get away.

My screenwriting and fiction work is all about engaging in dramatic form with the real, political world, and confronting big political and moral dilemmas. What, in 2007-8, could be more important than writing about Iraq?

Q: What was your aim and do you think you achieved it?

RB: Thanks to strong direction and a great cast the pieces worked on their own terms as drama. Politically, I think films like "Why This Rush?" – set in the UN – exposed the bullying of the smaller nations by the US/UK, and "Blowback" – about the impact of the coming of the war on the British Muslim community – took the audience into a community that is much discussed but little understood. Do I think we achieved what we set out to achieve? Very much so.

Q: Various themes were covered in the countdown: the UN, Colonel Tim Collins speech, the weapons inspectors in Iraq... Were there any other aspects that ideally you would have wanted to cover?

RB: At the outset, we decided to dramatize events that happened exactly on the day five years ago.

This limited us in some ways, as, obviously, did the time frame (the 10 days running up to the start of the invasion).

We would have liked to cover Katherine Gunn's case. She was the GCHQ (British central intelligence H.Q.) worker who leaked documents showing that British and American intelligence agencies were bugging members of the UN Security Council.

The "dodgy dossier" and the use of intelligence by Blair and Bush to make the political case for war were other areas we would have been interested in covering but they fell outside the time frame.

However, I think there was more than enough meat in what we delivered.



Q: The hypocrisy of western democracy was so evident in the stories – was this purposely highlighted or an inevitable factor?

RB: No, it wasn't done on purpose. I think events speak for themselves.

Q: Your novels are historically set although they all have relevant bearings on current political situations. Is your starting point events today and how society should learn from history, or...?

RB: Everything that is happening now has happened before. I am fascinated by the parallels between the past and the present.

My novel *The Catastrophist* was about the conspiracy to thwart the independence of the Congo in 1960, but it was also read by critics as an allegory for Ireland.

Likewise *Havoc*, in its Third Year, set in 17th-century England, was about religious fundamentalism and intolerance then and now. Having said that, I'm now writing a novel set in contemporary England, to do with privacy and media intrusion and with the soaring numbers of children who are being sent to British jails.

It's maybe worth pointing out that although my books and films make a political point I never forget about the aesthetics of the work. Novels and films have to deliver all the things we expect of them: narrative, character, beautiful

writing, the creation of another world.

Q: What are your comments on the Irish government's role, and that of the population of Ireland, in the "war on terror"?

RB: Shannon airport should not be used as a staging post for US troops taking part in an illegal war. There is also concern that secret "rendition" flights are using Irish airspace and airports.

I would like to be convinced this is not happening. I am also concerned about the role of Irish troops in Chad.

Q: What do you feel is the political role and responsibility of workers in the media in today's society, both professionally and personally?

RB: The primary role, as I see it, is to hold power to account. Most media organizations are now anti-war. It's easy to be now, with the evidence of disaster all around us.

But it was more important before the invasion went ahead. Blair and Bush got the benefit of the doubt from too many newspapers when they made their ludicrous claims about the threat Iraq posed. The New York Times later apologized to its readers for its earlier line on WMD. It's good the paper apologized but really it's too late. They should have got it right at the time. It might not have dissuaded Bush, but Blair was an opinion poll politician; if the media had called him on WMD and the whole principle of armed intervention it might have prevented British soldiers going in.

Q: Are you politically active in any group or organisation or do you see your political role as an individual one?

RB: My political engagement is primarily through my writing, whether it is about Falluja, Afghanistan, prison policy or Islamophobia. But I also get involved in single-issue campaigns, and of course I march.

I've never been a committee man – I don't have the patience – and, partly as a result of my experience in the north of Ireland, I detest sectarianism on the left. I'm more of a popular front person.

On the left we have always to remember that the enemy is not another left group with a different ideological emphasis, but global capitalism and its sponsors. People today know that capitalism is failing and they are looking for answers. They don't want feuding factions. They want a war forward.

Ronan Bennett's latest novel "Zugzwang" was serialised in the Observer newspaper. It is now available in paperback. *The Catastrophist*, Ronan's third novel, was shortlisted for the Whitbread Novel Award. *Havoc*, in its Third Year, won the Hughes and Hughes/Sunday Independent Irish Novel of the Year Award 2004.

PERSEPOLIS:



Breathtaking animation, but not enough reality

Persepolis gives a narrow and inaccurate portrayal of Iran's history, writes Dominic Kouros Kavakeb

PERSEPOLIS IS the cinematic adaptation of Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel, which is based upon her life growing up in Iran.

Her story is set against the backdrop of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the 1980-88 war between Iran and Iraq.

The animated film gives a view of Iranian society through the eyes of a middle class young woman.

This makes an interesting story and is at times visually stunning, with breathtaking animation which is cleverly used.

The film takes us through Marjane's life as she experiences tumultuous times in Iran. She then moves to Vienna and struggles with her identity as an Iranian in Europe. On returning to Iran in the 1990s she finds a repressive regime still intact and in the end moves to France, clearly troubled by the thought of leaving people behind in "backward" Iran.

Marjane's perception of the extraordinary events that took place in Iran is the key focus for the film.

She was clearly raised in a highly political family and her relationship with her family is an important theme of the movie.

But her family background is not that of an ordinary Iranian – she is a great granddaughter of Nasser al-Din Shah, who ruled Persia, as Iran was then called, from 1848 until 1896.

So her insight into events is somewhat different to that of most Iranian people.

A particular inspiration is her Uncle Anoush – a communist who had been involved in the overthrow of the Shah's dictatorship in 1979.

After the revolution he was brutally executed by the Islamic state and became a hero to the rebellious young Marjane. But the film does not go into the politics of the revolution in any great depth.

Marjane and her family are certainly in favour of the overthrow of the Shah.

But the mass resistance of ordinary workers is not shown in the film. Instead, resistance is portrayed as purely individual – such as deciding to take off a hijab or having alcohol at a party.

This distorts the reality of the Iranian Revolution.

The portrayal of the other important event of Marjane's early years – the war between Iran and Iraq – is even more lacking in political analysis.

The harsh reality of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran is barely discussed and instead the film focuses on the repression used by the Iranian government during this time.

The fact that the Iraqi army was backed to the hilt by the US to crush the Iranian Revolution is lost in the film.

At one point Marjane mentions that "both sides were armed by Western powers" but such a statement doesn't come anywhere near to doing justice to the reality of the war.

The film gives the impression that the Iranian government was to blame for the war and that the roles played by Iran and Iraq were equally bad.

This is suggested several times.

A childhood friend of Marjane is brainwashed by a teacher into joining the army to fight Saddam, motivated by religious fanaticism.

As a piece of artwork *Persepolis* is successful. But it gives a pessimistic view of Iranian society.

The film offers little in terms of a real understanding of Iranian society – an understanding that we so desperately need at a time when the image we get from the pro-war mass media is Iran as a brutal medieval theocracy.

Unfortunately, *Persepolis* does nothing to dispel this myth.

Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed



Augusto Boal, founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed

Photos: Paul Geraghty

By PAUL O'BRIEN

AUGUSTO BOAL and his son Julian were in Dublin recently to participate in a theatre seminar, while here they spoke to Socialist Worker.

Augusto Boal founded the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, a Forum Theatre that invites the audience to think of itself as an active participant in the drama.

In the 1960s Boal began to experiment with new forms of theatre. Inspired by the educational ideas of Paulo Freire (author of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) and outraged at social injustice, he started producing agit-prop theatre in Brazil's poorest districts.

By inviting spectators to act out their ideas he created Forum Theatre, which generates solutions to problems and rehearses the possibilities of radical change in society.

Boal was arrested, tortured, and eventually exiled to Argentina by the Brazilian military dictatorship, where he published his first book *Theatre of the Oppressed* in 1973.

Boal returned to Rio de Janeiro after the overthrow of the military junta. He is a supporter of President Lula. Julian is director of the Paris Theatre of the Oppressed, he is also a supporter of the Revolutionary Communist League in France.

SW: You have been accused by your critics of politicising aesthetics, like Sean O'Casey and Bertolt Brecht. Could you speak about the contribution you have made to the aestheticisation of politics?

AB: Somebody once proposed me for the Nobel Peace Prize and in a letter to Lula, our President, regarding the nomination, I wrote exactly that to him: "not only did I politicise aesthetics but I aestheticised politics".

I was also a politician then - that is why I smiled when you said that. People who say that you are politicising aesthetics are people who



But many in these cultural projects politically question the government. I question it. I want more. I want agrarian reform. I was against the payment of the International debt, but it was paid.

don't know anything about aesthetics and they don't know anything about politics. You should know that all kinds of theatre everywhere is a political vision of society and if that political vision has a standpoint and has a point of view then of course its politics. All of theatre is a vision of life. It's politics.

SW: How do you respond to those who say political theatre is dead?

AB: Julian has written a very beautiful book called *As Imagens de um Teatro Popular*, in which he analyses the movement that exists in Brazil - the popular centres of culture.

This movement was extraordinary in that it politicised a great part of the population but at the same time it was from the top down. In other words, it said what people should write or paint - the movement came with orders.

This kind of political theatre in which you give messages - you believe that you are being an artist; that you are more than a spectator has of course passed on; today, we do not do that.

That is why I changed to the Theatre of the Oppressed in which it is much more political than what I did before, because it stimulates people to think and to act and not only to receive a message and become an automaton and do things because that's the way to do it. I believe that political theatre and culture is much more alive than it was before.

Before, it was accepted to go to the proletariat and say do this or to the peasants and say do that. Now, we try and stimulate the people to do what they are able to do, and what they want to do.

SW: Julian has the Iraq war found a theatrical response in France?

JB: In France there was no response to the war. There are some plays from time to time about Palestine

or about other kind of subjects but I do not want to say anything bad about political theatre because we just destroy our confidence in ourselves if we do.

But the fact is that many people are celebrating the death of political theatre just because they think political theatre wasn't good enough, or that it was too dogmatic.

There is no understanding of political history - knowing that playwrights like Brecht, Meyerhold, Mayakovsky, or some of the lesser-known playwrights in Germany and France had completely reinvented theatre and that they were also political activists.

Therefore to make a sharp separation between political theatre - that is boring, not original in form, that would not necessarily be asking the right questions and mainstream theatre - is a boundary that simply doesn't exist.

It's not that there are no boundaries - the question we have to ask ourselves is the one raised by Jean Luc Godard: "if we are activists, for who, against who, for what, against what".

If you don't answer these questions then the political orientation that you have is too vague in order to claim that you are really political.

SW: Playwrights such as David Hare have developed the idea of documentary drama where theatre has to substitute for the failure of journalism, such as in Iraq.

AB: I am not familiar with that type of theatre, but I can tell you that the Theatre of the Oppressed started as a forum called the Newspaper Theatre at a time when we had repression, imprisonment and torture in Brazil.

We understand that we could no longer do what we wanted to do and show it to our audience. We started using techniques to transform the news in the newspaper into a theatrical scene, to show how newspapers are a form of fiction like any other.

So sometimes they say some truths, but not many times, or parts of the truth and then you don't understand what is really happening.

I always say that semantics is a battlefield. You have a word, and then you say that word means such a thing, and it does not - like you call the United States a democratic country - that is an absurdity.

How can you say it's democratic if you need money to buy space in the newspaper or time on television? We need to demystify newspapers as well as television.

JB: I never saw Hare's documentary drama. The question arises, what is the political orientation of the drama?

If it is just reproducing the news or if it is challenging the news, then that is another question.

The thing is, I am not against or in favour of any kind of theatre, its just I have to see where it is going to politically. There is one thing we see very clearly right now.

When we go back to the Vietnam war everyone remembers the image of the little girl running, burnt with napalm. Now, we have the image of the Abu Ghraib tortures, but no one remembers that.

The power of the image, the power of the raw news, no longer has an impact, so we have to look in a different direction.

The images presented on the news, no matter how terrible, are no longer involving us or touching us. We have to look at different ways of getting the people involved.

SW: A number of artists and writers are worried that the way the state promotes and finances the arts has compromised their ability to speak truthfully. You are currently working with Gilberto Gil, the Brazilian Minister of Culture, on a number of projects, is there a danger in this? Instead of the voice of the oppressed finding expression, the voice of the government is inserted into the community?

AB: No, not at all. I support the government of Lula and it's the first time in my life of working professionally in the theatre, perhaps sixty years, that I have supported the government. Some of them in the past were not so bad, but they were weak and undecided.

This is the first time the government has had a very clear cultural programme. Gilberto Gil has said that he was inspired by the work we had been doing before against the old government.

We do not follow the government's direction - Lula came to talk to us and spoke about the culture that comes from the people and is not imposed on the people - things we have been saying for thirty years or more, so there is a total identity in the culture.

There are things that I do not agree with; I think he should have made a more extensive agrarian reform and things like that, but in matters of culture we agree totally.

In no way can the Theatre of the Oppressed serve a government or master, because it is really democratic in the best sense of the word.

We present the problem and now say it's for you to solve and its for you to try and find solutions or find that there is no solutions, but we don't come and say do this or do that. We never say that.

Please send me what you write because I love Gilberto Gil very much. I love him as a composer and singer. I taught him the first lessons of how to handle the stage. We have to support him and the Cultura Viva (Living Culture) programme because it is democratic. But many in these cultural projects politically question the government. I question it. I want more. I want agrarian reform. I was against the payment of the International debt, but it was paid.

In conclusion, I want to say that Brazil has never been so democratic as it is now. It is the best government we have ever had, but it is not the best to which we can aspire.

RESISTING WAR CRIMES IS NOT A CRIME

DEFEND THE RAYTHEON 9

IT HAS been confirmed that the trial of Derry Anti War Coalition (DAWC) activists, the Raytheon 9, will start on Monday May 19th, in the Laganside Courts in Belfast.

The Raytheon 9 are charged with criminal damage and affray as a result of the non-violent direct action taken by DAWC on 9th August 2006 at the height of the Israeli assault on Lebanon.

There will be a mass protest outside the Court (opposite the Waterfront) from 9.30 to 10.30 on Monday 19th and every Monday morning as long as the trial continues.

One of the defendants, journalist and civil rights' activist Eamonn McCann, told Non Violent News "we can't ask people to protest on a daily basis, but those who can spare an hour would be very welcome inside the Court to show support.

Also, we will be gathering outside the Court every morning at 10.00am and we would be delighted to see anyone who wants to come along for just five minutes, to cheer us on, read a poem, do a piece of street theatre or anything else."

Meanwhile, support for the Raytheon 9 is flooding in from across Britain and Ireland and as far afield as Australia.

The Derry Anti War Coalition, which organised the action that led to the arrest of the nine, has linked up with campaigners in Wales who oppose British government plans to build a massive £14 billion Military Academy.

Davy McAuley, travelled to Cardiff recently to speak on behalf of the DAWC at a protest rally called by the Stop the St Athan's Military Academy Campaign.

He says the proposed military academy "looks set to become Britain's 'School of the Americas' - a centre for counterinsurgency training and future imperialist adventures abroad."

"The creation of a military super-academy at St Athan, between Cardiff and Swansea, was announced as a done deal in January 2007.

Despite the fact this represented the biggest PFI in history, involving £14 billion of taxpayers' money, there had been no debate in either Westminster or the Welsh Assembly (Senedd).

"DAWC were invited to speak",



Members of the Raytheon Nine and their supporters. Their trial begins in Belfast on May 19

he says, "because the winning bidders for the project were the Metrix consortium.

This consortium includes Raytheon and the anti-war people of Wales are as unhappy with their taxes pouring profits into the coffers of arms traders as are the anti-war people of Derry.

"The consortium also includes Qinetiq, the privatised research and development wing of the MoD. Qinetiq was recently the subject of intense criticism by the National Audit Office. Its privatisation was proposed by MoD managers - who then saw their shares rise 10,000% on the day of the sale!

Campaigners in Wales say that Raytheon, Qinetiq and friends will not just be training UK armed forces at St Athan.

They will train any soldiers, sailors and air force personnel that are willing to pay for the privilege. And like all PFIs, the St Athan academy will be subsidised by the taxpayer, and if necessary, bailed out with public money.

Mr McAuley says that, in any case, "people need to think about what else could be done with £14 billion!

With hospitals and schools closing throughout Wales and the North of Ireland, with a desperate need to improve social facilities, create sustainable sources of energy etc, such public money could be invested in socially useful projects rather than the preparation for future wars of occupation like Iraq.

This invitation to the DAWC came

just days after Raytheon Systems Ltd, (RSL) Glenrothes (Scotland was targeted by activists in solidarity with the Raytheon 9.

The Scottish Raytheon plant was blockaded from 6.30 am till 2.45pm when activists, including one who uses a wheelchair, chained themselves to the front gate.

One of the Scottish anti-war activists, retired schoolteacher Irene Willis, 63 stated, "The actions of Raytheon Systems Ltd should be fully investigated. International Law holds a corporation liable when it knowingly supplies weapons that are used to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity. Raytheon in Glenrothes manufacture the GPS-aided navigation system and control systems for

the Paveway guided "bunker busting" bombs produced in the US and sold to Israel who used them in their war on Lebanon July/Aug 2006. Like people in Derry, we feel we have to oppose their presence here."

There will be daily updates on the website www.raytheon9.org during the trial.

Anyone who thinks they can help in any way should email resistderry@aol.com. There is a Raytheon 9 support group in Belfast to organise solidarity during the trial. It will try to provide accommodation for travelling supporters. Contact Gordon on 07742531617. For buses from Dublin, contact Mary on 0872917415 For buses from Derry, contact Davy on 07521527208 or Goretti on 07973528772