

# Socialist Worker

# SACK COWEN -GET RID OF THIS CLOWN



THE LATEST Irish Times/MRBI polls shows that only 17 percent of the electorate support Fianna Fail, but Brian Cowen says he will stay in office until 2012, backed up by the Greens.

Cowen has no mandate from the people to be Taoiseach or to bail out banks and inflict suffering on society.

The government's contempt for democracy was revealed when they rejected a bill to hold bye-elections within six months of the death or resignation of any TD.

The collapse in FF support occurred before the latest revelations about the banking crisis.

The first bombshell came from Denis Casey, the former chief executive of Irish Life and permanent.

He said that the Department of Finance knew about a fictitious loan of €7.45 billion, which his company gave to Anglo-Irish Bank to hide its losses.

He even claimed that the governor of the Central Bank and the Financial Regulator had asked him to participate in the 'green jersey agenda'.

## Banking Reports

Two reports on the banking crisis by establishment figures have added further to the story.

Central Bank governor, Patrick Honohan, was a former economist with the World Bank and is a dyed-in-the-wool supporter of capitalism.

But he claimed that regulators had shown 'an unduly deferential relationship with the banks' and that this policy was driven from the very top of the Department of Finance, presided over by Brian Cowen.

According to the Central Bank Act of 1997, directors of banks were supposed to sign compliance statements to personally guarantee adequate reserves to support the huge loans

they had taken out.

But due to lobbying by banks FF held private 'pre-consultation' meetings with key bankers. Then, according to Honohan:

"Following a discussion with the Department of Finance it was agreed by the Financial Regulator not to implement the provision as set out in the Central Bank Act, 1997."

In other words, the law was set aside because the rich barons at the head of banking did not like it.

As a direct result of this decision – led by Brian Cowen – the people of Ireland will be paying between €30 billion and €50 billion to rescue the banks!

## Tax-breaks

The other way that Fianna Fail exacerbated the crisis was through a host of tax-breaks to help their rich friends in the construction sector.

The second (Watson-Regling) report notes that by 2005 according to OECD figures: "the cost of 'tax expenditures (breaks)' had become larger than the remaining income tax receipts" and were "more than three times larger than on average in the EU."

The picture could not be clearer. This economy was ruined by a wealthy elite of bankers, FFers, and speculators deluded by greed and self-importance.

The head of that Mafia elite was none other than Brian Cowen and before we do anything else, we have to get rid of this clown.

On June 23rd, Cowen will address a bosses banquet at the Mansion House in Dublin at 6.30.

Be there with the Right to Work campaign to drive this clown out of office.

## Will Labour move left?

A new political landscape now exists, as the

Labour Party is now the most popular party in the country.

It reflects a desire to shift left and give voice to the huge anger against the rich elite who have destroyed the country.

Union votes on the Croke Park deal show that many workers reject the treacherous policy of the ICTU of surrender to Fianna Fail – but they do not yet have the confidence to fight.

Opposition – for the moment – is therefore seeking an electoral expression and Labour has gained because it has tacked left in its rhetoric.

The would be leader of Fine Gael, Richard Bruton, acknowledged this when he said "Labour has gone after the protest vote and has benefited."

This huge shift to the left shows that the Irish population want radical answers and so the growing support for Labour is to be welcomed.

## Warning signs

But two warning signs show why we need a more radical left which puts pressure on the Labour Party.

First, despite the fact that Fianna Fail and Fine Gael now only command 45 percent of the vote between them, Labour is still looking to form a coalition with one of these right-wing parties.

If Labour was genuinely moving to the left, it would state openly that it wants to put the civil war parties out of existence and would seek to form a left government that is supported by Sinn Fein and others.

Eamonn Gilmore, however, is terrified of doing this because it would raise the aspirations of workers for really radical measures to tackle the crisis.

Second, the experience of Greece carries an

even more dire warning signal.

In 2009, the Greek Labour Party equivalent ('PASOK') swept to power on a promise to deal with the speculators and the rich.

But within months, it had succumbed to capitalist pressure and pushed through a terrible programme of cuts.

There is no reason to think that the Irish Labour Party would act differently.

This is why it is vital that even as Labour is carried upwards by a rising tide, that a strong radical left emerges.

The People Before Profit Alliance has entered discussions with others on the radical left and it is hoped that a major Left alliance will emerge to offer a strong alternative.

**RIGHT TO WORK CAMPAIGN**

**PROTEST**

**BRIAN COWEN**

**BOSSSES' BANQUET**

(IBEC PRESIDENT'S DINNER)

**ON THE MENU**

- LOWER WAGES
- SLASH HEALTHCARE
- CUT JOBS & SERVICES
- DIVIDE PUBLIC & PRIVATE -
- SECTOR WORKERS

**6.30PM WEDNESDAY 23RD JUNE**

**MANSION HOUSE**

14 WILSON STREET DUBLIN 2



# IBEC: Cowen at the Bosses Banquet

By KIERAN ALLEN

BRIAN COWEN'S attendance at the €1,300-a-table bosses' banquet is a symbol of where the real power lies in Ireland.

The IBEC President's annual dinner brings together the top capitalists who will be cheering on Cowen because he is like a puppet who dances to their tune.

IBEC can congratulate themselves on a successful recession where they have used 'shock doctrine' tactics, attacking union rights to protect their profits.

In February 2008, they stated that, "wage levels require a downward correction of the order of 10 percent", even though openly acknowledging "a further deflationary effect on the economy in 2009 and 2010".

Cowen and the FF-Green government did what they were told and launched a vicious attack on public sector wages.

The first attack came in the form of a 'pension levy' which IBEC had long advocated. The second attack involved a straight-forward reduction in pay.

This set a benchmark for IBEC members in the private sector to follow and so Ireland took the lead in Europe in attacking workers' wages.

IBEC then targeted cuts on social welfare recipients. IBEC stated that "In light of the predicted decline in living standards... all social welfare rates should be immediately reduced by 3 percent."

Once again the FF-Green government did exactly what they were told.

IBEC's latest target is the minimum wage, which they claim has, "a negative impact on our competitive edge".

The minimum wage is paid to just 5 percent of the Irish workforce who are mainly concentrated in the retail and hotel sectors. If it is applied to all employers, it could not make one employer less competitive than the other.

But IBEC's propaganda wars are based only on the logic of an international race-to-the-bottom in the narrow pursuit of profits.

IBEC also wants to change Section 41 of the Minimum Wage Act of 2000.

This allows employers to claim inability to pay, provided a majority of workers agree.

**IBEC wants to exclude their workers' right to disagree.**

IBEC has also opposed any legislation guaranteeing union recognition. Its board members include the bosses of Hewlett Packard and Microsoft, two US companies totally opposed



Eugene Sheehy

to unions.

Once again the Irish government puppets complied, refusing to give workers a right to join a union, exposing the absurd claims by SIPTU's Jack O'Connor that the Lisbon Treaty would force them to do so.

## Who are IBEC?

IBEC is the Irish Business and Employers Confederation.

The board of IBEC includes notorious banker, Eugene Sheehy, the former CEO of Allied Irish Bank.

Sheehy has retired on a pension of €526,000 a year, the equivalent of an average wage of 15 workers.

Another key figure is Gary McCann, a recent TASC re-

port named as one of the ten most connected company directors.

McCann not only sat on the board of Anglo-Irish Bank but is also a director of Smurfit, United Drug and the Dublin Airport Authority.

Front man for IBEC today is Danny McCoy, a former professional economist with the ESRI, where he regularly recommended wage restraint.

IBEC is organised around a set of 'policy committees' lobbying government to ensure a pro-employer policy is adopted. IBEC's 'sensible rules group' pushed light business regulation while their 'economics and taxation group' has helped

ensure that Ireland remains a tax haven for the rich.

IBEC gets €1 million a year from semi-state bodies for 'professional advice' on how to undermine workers' claims.

## IBEC: The Lobby Machine

IBEC'S TENTACLES spread into every nook and cranny of the Irish State.

The HSE board (see page 3) is dominated by business people so it is easy to see why they favoured the 'co-location policy' to push private hospitals.

Half of the former board of Fas were IBEC members and at one stage it was chaired by Brian Geoghan, the director of economic policy at IBEC and husband of Mary Harney. Geoghan set up a PR company, MRPA Kinman, which lobbied his wife, the Minister of Health, about restrictions on the drinks industry.

IBEC even gets an input into the mathematics curriculum in the schools because everything in the Irish State is designed to suit business interests.

The Right to Work protest at the IBEC dinner on the 23rd of June will help to shine a light on one of the most sinister and dangerous organisations in Irish society.

## PUBLIC SECTOR: SIPTU AND IMPACT CARRY TERMS OF SURRENDER

**THE TWO** biggest unions, SIPTU and IMPACT, have voted for the Croke Park agreement and the ICTU are now likely to accept the surrender deal.

Under its terms, public sector workers will give up the fight to reverse the pension levy and those under €35,000 a year will get vague promises that the government will consider reversing pay cuts, provided they cover for the loss of 17,000 jobs.

In return, rosters in the health services can be changed; workers will lose an automatic right to increments; they can be re-deployed up to 45 kilometres from their home or workplace; and new contracts can be drawn up for some groups.

It is the worse deal ever to be negotiated by the Irish trade union movement.

The majority of ICTU unions actually voted against the deal and two non ICTU unions, the Garda Representative Authority and the soldiers union, PDFORA also voted against.

The deal is, therefore, only being pushed through because of the bureaucratic machine in SIPTU and

IMPACT.

Increasingly, this machine has only one central mission: spread a message of defeatism.

Its method of operation is to spread fear.

It argued that if workers did not vote for the Croke Park deal their only option was an all out strike - led, coincidentally, by the same union leaders who were too incompetent to fight.

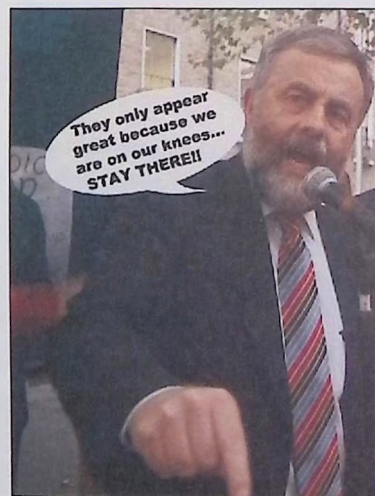
Occasionally this message is covered by a fake left rhetoric from SIPTU's Jack O'Connor who denounced the evils of FF policies while

simultaneously urging surrender to them.

When the mood of workers swings between anger and demoralisation, the bureaucracy gets away with defeatism where there are not organised networks of resistance.

It is significant, for example, that No votes were recorded in key branches in SIPTU and IMPACT where such networks exist.

SIPTU firefighters, for example, voted 87% against the deal because they have a good shop stewards network that is not reliant on full



## Workers Protest at Restaurant Association's Gala Dinner



By PEADAR O'GRADY

**THE RESTAURANT** Workers Action Group, established by the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, held a protest on Wednesday, 9 June at the Restaurant Association of Ireland's black tie gala awards dinner at the Burlington Hotel.

The Restaurant Association of Ireland is calling for a reduction in the national minimum wage and an abolition of the Joint Labour Committee (JLC), the system that establishes wages and working conditions for catering and other industries.

The Restaurant Association of Ireland is lobbying the government to cut wages by about 20% - a huge blow for workers earning less than €20,000 per year. Many restaurant

workers have also lost pay as their hours have been reduced. "It is nothing less than shameful to attack the wages of those who are struggling the most," says Siobhan O'Donoghue, Director of the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI).

Protesting workers offered a contrasting scene to the champagne and cocktail reception, five-course meal, and black tie glamour inside the Restaurant Association of Ireland's 2010 Awards Dinner.

"Restaurant owners have money for champagne and lavish events, but they don't have money to pay us? I don't know any restaurant workers who attend extravagant events like this," says Manohar Singh, a restaurant worker originally from India.

200 workers

protested at Minister Batt O'Keefe's office on June 2nd calling on the government to give migrant workers the right to change employers and end what Labour's Michael D. Higgins called a system of "bonded Labour".

MRCI's Julius Fohasi summed up the demand for: "Fair and equal rights for migrant workers on work permits to change jobs so they are not trapped in exploitative situations". It is in all workers' interests to prevent employers exploiting fellow workers and cutting wage rates. Trade unions should recruit and defend migrant workers on the traditional union principle that 'An insult to one is an insult to all'.

MRCI website: www.mrci.ie

time officials.

Socialists need to fight a rearguard battle against every anti-worker clause in

the Croke Park deal, while pointing out how these resulted from a leadership who collaborated with FF.

Crucially, real networks of opposition need to be forged inside SIPTU and IMPACT.

## Jack O'Connor: 'Business Person of the Month'

**WITH NO** hint of irony, Business and Finance magazine has named SIPTU president Jack O'Connor its 'Business Person of the Month' for recommending the Croke Park deal to his union's members.

The magazine quotes him as saying:

"If you have a long industrial campaign... the interpretation of

it externally would be that the Government wasn't able to honour its commitments and consequently, the credibility of Government bonds would be very much in question.

"Now what are the wealthy going to do? If the answer is still nothing, it's going to be a political campaign."

What part of the IBEC

plan to cut wages, welfare and public services does Jack O'Connor not understand?

The government has bailed out the banks and businesses and now Jack O'Connor bails them all out.

Just who is representing Workers' interests then?

A growing angry rank and file in the unions must be the answer.



# FACILITIES FOR HORSES IN CLONDALKIN

By **CLLR. GINO KENNY**,  
South Dublin County Council.

A **CAMPAIGN** has begun to make land available for the use of horses in Clondalkin.

Why should land be left idle by absentee landlords when it could be put to better use for the good of the community?

There has always been an issue with land for horses in Clondalkin. Many people, young and old, find great solace in horse ownership, in looking after them and jockeying them.

Clondalkin has a great tradition of horse ownership in Dublin, but horse owners here still have no place to keep and stable horses in their own area. Other big suburban areas in Dublin, like Ballymun, Ballyfermot and Tallaght, have such facilities.

50 people attended the campaign's first meeting at Ronanstown Youth Service in Neilstown. The next step for the campaign is to lobby South Dublin County Council to engage with the campaign to look for suitable land in the locality.

With so much unused land we ask: whose land is it anyway?

(If you are interested in getting involved in the campaign, contact Gino at 085 721 1574)

## News in Brief

### Peter Sutherland: Still fiddling while BP burns.

ELITE BUSINESSMAN Peter Sutherland side-stepped the April BP oil rig disaster he was responsible for setting up (see page 4) when he resigned as BP chair in January.

He is a prominent supporter of Brian Lenihan, the Lisbon Treaty and cuts for workers.



Peter Sutherland

Despite a US government bailout, Sutherlands' disgraced Goldman-Sachs bank will still pay out an unbelievable \$5 billion in bonuses to its bank bosses this year!

Sutherland had to resign from RBS/Ulster Bank after it collapsed following a banking deal brokered by Goldman Sachs and had to be bailed out to the tune of £20 billion.

Former Fine Gael attorney general and AIB chair, Sutherland holds powerful positions in the exclusive, international neoliberal business lobby groups the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg Group.

He is also chair of the London School of Economics and UN special representative responsible for migration and development!

### Callely cheats on expenses

FF SENATOR Ivor Callely has resigned the FF whip after he admitted claiming expenses from a house in West Cork even though he lives in Clontarf, Dublin, a few miles from the Senate.



Ivor Callely

Another Fianna Fáil senator, Larry Butler, resigned the FF whip after admitting his expenses claims were from his house in Co Kilkenny rather than his Dublin home.

FF politicians seem to believe that it's not enough that they live in two houses when workers can't even afford one, but that we should have to pay for them too.

Callely and Butler should be kicked out and take Brian Cowen and his hangers-on with them.

# Children sold out to save the Banks

By **CHILD PROTECTION SOCIAL WORKER**

IN THE week Daniel McAnaspie (a 17-year-old boy murdered in state care) was buried, the failings of the Child Protection system were highlighted.

Just as we reeled in shock and anger from the child abuse and neglect cover-up scandal by the Catholic hierarchy, we now learn of Child Protection cover-ups by the corporate-led HSE.

The HSE failed to publish any reports into the deaths of up to 200 children until some of these reports were leaked.

What this amounts to is a series of systemic failures with the added insult of the HSE not having or providing accurate figures on child deaths.

Whatever the value of holding a Children's Rights Referendum, the fact is that legislation exists, un-enforced for 20 years, entitling children to a Social Worker, but still 1 in 5 of the 5,700 children in care have none; well over a thousand children.

### 270 Social Workers by December 2009?

In the last month the State pumped another €100m into EBS bank and will soon put in another €775m.

It would only cost €15m to implement the Ryan Commission's recommendations; clearly not a priority for the Golden Circle's government.

A key recommendation was that 270 new Social Workers would be employed in 2009.

At best 30 have been appointed. Recently FF Minister for Children, Barry Andrews said there could be "no quick-fix" in child protection services, but soon after said that he believed children in care were being "well looked after".

It is clear this government has no understanding of child protection as approximately 500 have disappeared and 200 have died in state care!

### Public Causes of Private Troubles

Public service Social Work can provide a barometer for how society treats the disadvantaged, highlighting the public, social causes of personal problems, such as poverty, isolation and alienation as well as lack of housing and childcare facilities.

However Social Work can also be used to control and regulate the poor.

When right-wing governments are in power, their main agenda ("family values") is to roll back the welfare state. So responsibility is put on families, regardless of their social conditions, in order to justify cuts.



17-year-old Daniel McAnaspie, murdered while in state care

With the ever widening gap between rich and poor, with rising unemployment, it is possible to see how personal relationships can become distressed and distorted in an environment that breeds competition and individual failings.

Children depend on the adults caring for them and the resources they have at family and public service levels.

Free market globalisation has brought increased poverty, inequality, social and personal problems through wage cuts and cuts in social services including childcare.

### Resources, Services & Witch-hunts.

Services experience constant 'restructuring' and a huge increase in paperwork and less time with the real work of childcare and supporting families.

The tragic Baby P case in the UK illustrated a typi-

cal government cover-up strategy.

Despite evidence of past systemic failures (like Victoria Climbié) and delays in other health assessments, a witch-hunt and vilification of Social Workers ensued.

Rather than examine the lack of all childcare resources the 'incompetence' of the workers was used as a smokescreen.

In Ireland's current scandal Minister Andrews referred to "disciplinary action" against Social Workers despite the outcome of the reports citing "systemic failures".

Workers' organisations such as IMPACT and the IASW should oppose any scapegoating cover-ups and organise a fight to fund all social care services including housing and childcare.

To cherish all the nation's children equally should be a reality and not a slogan to hide behind.

# New HSE boss gets 40% pay rise

By **KIERAN ALLEN**

THE APPOINTMENT of ex-banker Cathal Magee as chief executive officer (CEO) of the Health Services Executive (HSE) shows how crony capitalism continues to flourish in Ireland.

Despite the government's talk of 'pulling together for the good of the country', Magee will be paid an obscene salary of €322,000. That's €100,000 more than the government said it would pay; a 40% pay rise!

But Magee's record as a former board member of Eircom and EBS bank is a disaster.

After the state company was privatised, vulture capitalists ripped off its assets, refused to properly invest in broadband



Cathal Magee

infrastructure and increased electricity bills. For his assistance, Magee received a payout of €3 million in salary and bonuses.

Eircom now has a net debt of €3.4 billion

and pays an annual interest bill of €200 million.

Magee was also on the board of the disgraced bank, EBS, on the risk committee that assessed loans.

The day of his HSE appointment the state had to pour €875 million into EBS because of its reckless lending. Few in the mainstream media saw the irony.

How could someone with this disastrous record be appointed to run our health service?

The answer lies in the nature of the HSE itself.

This bureaucratic monster was created by neoliberal fanatics who opposed democratic pressure on the health service. The HSE's failures also make arguments for

private healthcare easier.

Health Minister Mary Harney (married to former IBEC boss Brian Geoghan) followed this neoliberal dogma, appointing corporate hacks to the board of the HSE.

Liam Downey was CEO of medical technology company Becton Dickinson and on the National Executive of IBEC.

Eugene McCague is the chairperson of Arthur Cox, legal advisors to the government on the infamous bank guarantee scheme.

Pat Farrell was general secretary of Fianna Fail and is currently chair of the Irish Bankers Federation.

When these people control our health service, is it any wonder that they select another of their cronies as its CEO?

## 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.

The "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 Brown government.

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

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain. Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

### FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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

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

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

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

## Join the Socialists

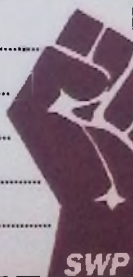
Fill in the form and send to  
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# BP oil disaster: Our seas sacrificed for their profits

By SIMON BASKETTER



IT'S HARD to grasp the awesome scale of the catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico caused by BP's Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.

BP and the US government first claimed that a 'mere' 1,000 barrels a day have poured into the ocean but some scientists believe the amount could be 60,000 or 70,000 barrels a day, making it by the far the worst oil disaster ever.

The reason for the different estimates on how much oil has leaked is money. Under the US Clean Water Act, BP could be fined up to £3,000 for every barrel of oil gushing into the Gulf. If its lower estimates are accepted it will save BP millions of dollars.

The 20 April explosion happened because BP was in a hurry to seal off the oil well. Eleven workers died as a result with many more seriously injured. Last October, BP, under then chairman Peter Sutherland (see article on page 2), was fined €70 million for failing to correct safety problems discovered after a 2005 explosion that killed 15 workers at BP's Texas City refinery.

## Environmental disaster

Oil is pouring into the deep currents of this semi-enclosed sea, poisoning the water and depriving it of oxygen so that entire classes of marine species are at risk of annihilation. The region's fishing industry will be destroyed. The full effect of the spill on fish, birds and marine mammals will not be known for generations.

Oil company crews are injecting the surface of the oil slick with toxic dispersant chemicals ('Corexit'). This can do more harm than good. It hides the extent of the catastrophe by dividing the oil into smaller parcels that sink to the seafloor. The Gulf of Mexico is filling with globs of heavy, black oil that will be harder to clean up - and will be carried to shore on currents and tides for decades to come.

Tony Hayward, the boss of BP claimed: "The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean. The amount of volume of oil and dispersant we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume."

## Why did it happen?

The cause of the oil spill is simple - the pursuit of profit at all costs.

The explosion on the Deepwater Horizon rig came after the well was capped with a cheap type of casing produced by Halliburton. BP rushed as it was leasing the rig for half a million dollars a day.

In 1979 an oil spill in the Gulf belched crude oil for 297 days! That well was only 150 feet below the sea surface. The current Deepwater Horizon disaster is 5,000 feet deep. Both then and now, the same critical piece of fail-safe equipment failed - the blowout preventer, but BP wouldn't spend the money to fix the problem.

The US oil-drilling regulator, the Minerals Management Service (MMS), was a tool of the oil companies. It provided leases without making the companies, including BP, obtain required environmental permits.

## Obama

The scale of the catastrophe is prompting some newspapers to call it 'Obama's Katrina'.

In 2009 BP spent nearly £11 million on lobbying the US government - and the leases for offshore drilling in the Gulf kept flowing. The total cost of the cleanup will be \$760 million - but for BP that is just 12 days' profits.

Obama says BP will pay "every cent" of the clean-up cost. But it was his administration that last year intervened to support the reversal of a court order that would have halted offshore oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Drilling, shipping, refining and burning oil is destroying the planet - at the local level through poisoned air and water, and globally by fuelling climate change.

A handful of massive corporations control the industry, backed to the hilt by powerful states - and they are willing to organise coups and wars in the pursuit of profit and power.

(Original full article in British SW, June 5th 2010)

# HOW TO DEFEAT ISRAEL

By KIERAN ALLEN

ISRAEL'S ATTACK on the Gaza flotilla has generated a huge wave of sympathy with the Palestinian cause.

Many are now asking how this violent, well-armed regime can be defeated.

A key element will be the international solidarity movement, which can isolate the Israeli regime as much as South Africa was isolated in the past.

The first crucial step lies in popularising a boycott of Israel. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has set an important precedent by supporting a boycott campaign. Recently, over 200 trade unionists came together to discuss how this might be achieved.

The ICTU's support could

allow the boycott movement to develop from a consumer boycott to a workers' boycott.

The unions should pledge to give full support to any retail workers who refuse to handle Israeli goods.

They should also follow the example of the Swedish dockers who are refusing to handle Israeli goods.

A second key element of the campaign must be pressure to close the Israeli Embassy in Dublin.

To date Fianna Fail has played a double game on Palestine.

It has expressed verbal sympathy and Foreign Minister Micheal Martin has travelled to Gaza in an apparent snub to Israel.

But behind the scenes, the FF-Green government has allowed Shannon airport to be used to

supply the Israeli military.

When Irish Anti-War Movement protestors staged a peaceful blockade at the Israeli embassy, they were met by a huge police presence which manhandled those present.

To counteract this hypocrisy, the IPSC and the IAWM and the unions should call for periodic mass peaceful blockades of the embassy until the ambassador is thrown out.

## WORKERS' ACTION IS THE KEY

Workers in the Middle East have the collective power to bring about real change.

The actions and struggles of Egyptian workers against their dictatorship and in solidarity with Palestine show how this change can begin to take place.

The Russian Marxist Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution explained this dynamic.

Trotsky sought to understand how revolutions could develop in countries where the working class was relatively small compared to the peasantry and other groups.

The rulers of Egypt will not deliver democracy or thoroughgoing reform.

Although they are junior partners in the imperialist order, they are still tied to it and won't confront it.

So workers must lead the fight with strikes, mass protests and great social movements. The power contained in such movements can grow into a challenge to capitalism itself.

Trotsky argued that revolu-

# Egypt's workers take to the streets against

*Hossam el-Hamalawy, an Egyptian socialist and journalist discusses the im-*



The road to Jerusalem passes through Cairo © by 3arabawy

A DOMINO effect is taking place. People are linking the causes of freedom for Palestine and freedom for Egyptian workers. Huge demonstrations of tens of thousands of people in Cairo and across Egypt, were the immediate response to the attack.

People denounce the Israelis in the chants before moving on to chanting about vote-rigging in the elections and police brutality here in Egypt.

People are drawing parallels between Israel's actions against peace activists and the Egyptian government's treatment of elections and campaigners.

This movement has put huge

pressure on the dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak.

That is why it has opened the Rafah crossing into Gaza. It wants to stop the criticism.

But the Rafah crossing is only designed for people to cross, not goods.

The government allows Israel to control the crossings for goods. It has now been forced to say the Rafah crossing will stay open indefinitely.

The Muslim Brotherhood (Egypt's largest opposition movement) is mobilising for Gaza. Its chants are directed at Israel, which is where the leadership wants all criticism to be directed.

But on a demonstration last week, socialists chanted, "Down with Mubarak", and the younger members of the Muslim Brotherhood joined in, only to be silenced by their elders.

So there is a tension there, and a new militancy among some sections.

## Strike wave

All of this has to be seen in the context of the strike wave that has swept Egypt since September 2006.

For the past six months, until last week, there was a permanent protest camp in the parliamentary

area of Cairo.

There were around ten different groups of workers there: textile workers, agricultural and land reclamation workers, telephone manufacturing workers and so on.

But some other elements were added.

There were people with disabilities and special needs there.

This is probably the first time that disabled people have come together to organise a protest in Egypt.

They were campaigning for the enforcement of the law that states that 5 percent of all public and private sector jobs should go



# EGYPT'S APARTHEID STATE

ons have to be permanent in no senses.

First, that workers have to fight to push any revolutionary struggle to the point where they could take power and abolish class distinctions altogether.

Second, it has to be international.

If the revolutionary process spreads to other countries, where workers are more numerous, it can become a 'permanent' process.

The movement in Egypt is already putting pressure on the government and opening up a pace for radical ideas to break through.

This is more advanced than what is happening in Turkey, where the state is trying to turn the anger at Israel's attack into a showing up of its own support.



## Mubarak and Israel

act the Israeli attack had in Egypt

These strike leaders became active over bread and butter economic issues for themselves and the workers they represent. But their consciousness has developed over the past two years.

They are politicised and talking about wider issues, and linking them together.

The economic is feeding into the political and vice versa.

Along with this there is confusion at the top. Mubarak, the dictator since 1981, is dying and looks like a corpse.

Mohamed El-Baradei, the former director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has just joined the opposition.

The rats feel like the ship is sinking.

### Solidarity

What we need is for people across the world to spread the word about our struggle here.

Our strategy is to reach out to the organisations of the working class: the trade unions, community groups, people's representatives, and keep up the pressure.

The regime is used to more middle-class movements against war and so on, but they do not know how to react to this joined up movement from below.

The strike leaders are now playing a role in the political debate in the country, and our rulers don't know how to handle that.

One of the first convoys to reach Gaza after the 2008-9 massacre was funded by striking workers from the city of Mahalla el-Kubra.

There are several aid convoys organised this time, with representatives from striking factories and delegations going to Gaza.

We are in a pre-revolutionary situation here.

At any second these things can join together. People are taking on new roles and new ideas.

There has been an upturn in struggle since 2006 and I hope that the left gets its act together.

I am proud of our achievements but it is not enough. Things are moving quickly and time is not on our side.

Read Hossam's Egyptian struggle blog at [www.arabawy.org](http://www.arabawy.org)

## Antiwar activists meet to escalate action

By CLAUDIA SABA

AFTER THE second attempt to 'blockade' the Israeli embassy on Tuesday June 8th, the Irish Anti War Movement held a meeting for new activists in the Central Hotel.

About 30 new activists came to the meeting. IAWM steering committee members appealed for original ideas in the campaign to liberate Palestine.

It was noted that Dublin saw more demonstrations in the week following the flotilla murders than any other European capital.

If Ireland were to lead the way in cutting diplomatic ties with Israel then other European countries could follow; the Irish element in the struggle against Israeli aggression is therefore of special importance.

The meeting was a lively exchange of imaginative ideas, many of them quite novel, and most coming from new activists.

Ideas included projecting images of goods banned from Gaza onto the Israeli embassy building; dropping banners from bridges; sending boycott teams on supermarket expeditions; filming boycotters in action to create fun boycott videos; launching a 'Tell the Truth' campaign to dispel Israeli propaganda; and suing Israel in the small claims court if you happened to have given a donation to the Free Gaza movement or in any other way had made a flotilla donation.

Additionally, a major gig for Palestine this summer was talked about.

The excitement and determination coming from new activists is breathing new life into the fight against Israeli occupation and apartheid.

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## World Cup 2010: People or Profit?

By CLLR. GINO KENNY

OK, LET'S get that fateful and painful November defeat out of the way, and exorcise what could have been: the tricolour rubber hammers; Trap this, Trap that merchandise.

It still hurts, even writing about it, but life goes on in football terms.

At least the nationalist crow-thumpers and profiteers might be silent and think more about making sport available to the masses in a real way rather than the Aviva way.

### South Africa

South Africa, for so long the pariah state for most of the 20th Century, that termed apartheid as natural law, will be hosting 'the beautiful game'.

But with all beautiful things, there is the ugly side of big business football.

The enormous economic contradictions lie side by side in today's South Africa; even after the end of apartheid. South Africa is the most unequal society in the world in relative wealth terms.

There has been enormous controversy around the 'clearing' of lands surrounding the brand new stadiums.

Similar to the run up to the World Cup in 1968 in Mexico, swathes of the urban poor, who live in abject poverty, have been removed from their homes to set up construction sites.

They have been forcibly relocated to what even the South African Press are calling "concentration camps".

When the invisible hand of sporting corporate forces reaches out for the mega-events of world sport, anybody or anything that gets in their way will be ruthlessly removed.

### Crass commercialism

The crass commercialism of corporate football will be FIFA's 12th man.

The big players of the corporate world will be aligning themselves with every endorsement possible to market their products.

If you hate Fianna Fail, then you won't like FIFA either. FIFA, football's world governing body, is so hell bent on the profit bottom line, that the Vuvuzela (a long thin horn that is blown at football matches) was deemed to be a weapon and banned from stadiums.

The Vuvuzela brings a sense of atmosphere to matches in Africa. FIFA's logic in trying to ban them was that the nice, prawn-sandwich heads watching on TV, might be put off by the racket and switch over to lawn tennis instead. Imagine asking spectators in Ireland, to stop playing

those silly drums of theirs. I think you call them bodhrans!

The real question was never about South Africa's ability to host the Cup, but about the Cup's impact on South Africa. South Africans were told that the tournament would boost jobs, infrastructure and the development of the country as a whole.

The cash-strapped government was lavish in funding the new facilities demanded by FIFA. But when the country was embroiled last summer in a series of massive protests by poor communities demanding basic service-delivery, local people frequently complained that public funds were being diverted to build stadiums and upgrade airports.

At the same time, 70,000 construction workers on the new stadiums went on strike against what they described as "famine-level" wages (\$100 per month).

Eventually, some of them were promised complementary tickets to watch a match at the stadium they helped to



build.

Now even this promise has been broken, as the host authorities try to maximize income from ticket sales (on which they rely because FIFA takes the broadcast and sponsorship revenues).

### The people's game?

But whatever the stooges of national flag-waving, mass marketing, paranoid endorsements and saturated consumerism say, football should always be the people's game.

The great passion of the South African people, whether they are there in the stadiums or not, will be the making of the World Cup.

What makes a great World Cup is the passion of the fans, the meeting of peoples from around the world and, of course, we hope, great football on the pitch.

It would be great for the continent of Africa to get a team into the Semi's for the first time (watch Ivory Coast).

But, there's no doubt, this World Cup is wide open. I'm guessing a Spain v Argentina final, and my plastic green shamrock will have to make do for Brazil 2014!



## Raytheon 9 Acquitted

# Resisting war crimes is not a crime – again!



The Raytheon Nine outside the Laganside Court after their acquittal

By GORETTI HORGAN,  
of the Raytheon Nine

THE SECOND trial of anti-war activists for occupying the Raytheon arms manufacturer in Derry ended in the acquittal of all nine women who had been charged with burglary and attempted criminal damage.

The jury accepted, by a unanimous verdict, that we were reasonable in our belief that: the Israel Defence Forces were guilty of war crimes in Gaza from Dec 2008 to Jan 2009; the Raytheon company, including its facility in Derry, was aiding and abetting the commission of these crimes; and the action we took was intended to have the effect of hampering or delaying the commission of those war crimes.

Even as the trial was in progress, Israel was again flouting international law. The last week of the trial was when the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza was attacked by Israel in international waters and at least 10 flotilla members murdered.

It was ironic that we took our action in solidarity with the people of Gaza and 18 months later, their situation is as bad as ever.

The outcome of the trial confirmed the decision of the jury in the previous Raytheon case arising from the 2006 as-

sault on Lebanon.

The significance of the two acquittals lies in the fact that both sets of defendants had to show to the jury not only that Raytheon was complicit in what the Israelis were doing but that what Israel was doing amounted to war crimes. Thus, like the men in the previous trial, we had to submit to the court a dossier containing media reports, the findings of human rights groups, eye-witness accounts, reports and statements from the United Nations, etc.

### Congratulations

The congratulations which began coming in by text and email within minutes of the verdict, from activists of the Freedom Flotilla, from Palestine, from friends in southern Lebanon and from anti-arms trade activists around the world as well as the broad anti-war movement in Ireland and Britain testified to the widespread understanding of the importance of the outcome.

Within days of the women's occupation, Raytheon announced that it was leaving Derry. Internal Raytheon and Invest Northern Ireland documents quoted during the trial leave no room for doubt that it was the activities of the Derry Anti War Coalition and the Foyle

Ethical Investment Campaign which got rid of Raytheon in the end. None of the formal resolutions or polite statements of complaint from major political parties had any measurable effect. It is clear that sustained activity, backed up by direct action speaks louder than words.

### Voices of solidarity

After the trial, some of the women explained why they had occupied Raytheon:

Betty Doherty: "Remember it was Christmas. And while our wains were playing with their toys, their wains were being killed by Raytheon bombs. Their schools were being bombed, even United Nations schools were bombed."

Diana King: "My town was hosting an armaments firm which is supplying specially designed arms to a country committing war crimes in Gaza."

Julia Torrojo: "The whole world was a witness; merciless Raytheon-built bombs were being dropped by the Israeli armed forces upon the neighbourhoods of Gaza, their hospital, their schools, their people. They had already killed hundreds of innocents but that day, after allegations by UN officials, that war crimes were being committed by the Israeli forces, I was determined to try and stop the

carnage, Raytheon's systems had to be paralysed and so their involvement in such Genocide."

Roisin Bryce: "I believed, and still believe that the assault on the people of Gaza by the Israeli Defence Forces was a war crime. We all saw it, repeated and repeated on TV. There was no intervention by the UN or any State to stop Israel."

Betty Doherty: "Someone had to do something. Because Raytheon was operating in our town we felt we could do something. We had to. If we didn't, who would?"

Roisin Barton: "Raytheon admitted to operating a 'one-company policy', meaning that if the mainframe was disabled in Derry; the computer network of the entire company would be disrupted."

Helen Reynolds: "The prosecution tried to make out that we had gone into Raytheon simply to protest against the war on Gaza, or to get media coverage for the protests against what the Israeli forces were doing. This wasn't true. We went in to disable the mainframe, to protect lives in Gaza."

Sharon Meenan: "Of course, the lawyers had to get us to say we were protecting property in Gaza because the law gives you more right to save property than to save lives."

## Defend Eugene McDonagh Campaign

By OWEN MCCORMACK

EUGENE MCDONAGH, an executive member of the NBRU was sacked by Dublin Bus management over an unofficial dispute last year at the Harristown bus depot.

Management tried to rush changes to routes with no consultation with the drivers involved.

Eugene stood with his members and intervened on their behalf with management.

When the dispute ended, the company threatened drivers with the Industrial Relations Act and launched an investigation that targeted Eugene and

other shop stewards.

Drivers were told they might be sacked or sued and were implicitly asked to give statements against their representatives.

Eugene had worked for 22 years with the company and had an unblemished work record.

He was an active trade unionist and had publicly campaigned against cuts to public transport.



Eugene McDonagh

### Precedent

We believe this case sets a precedent in trade union members being threatened with being held personally liable for strikes under the 1990 Industrial Relations Act.

Eugene is awaiting a hearing at the Employment Appeals Tribunal, and we are intent on highlighting his case among the wider trade union movement

We are also asking that you support his reinstatement campaign, which will be lengthy and may involve substantial legal and personal costs (account details below).

We would also ask that you express your opposition to the sacking of a shop steward by writing directly to Dublin Bus c/o 59 upper O'Connell St Dublin

1, marked: FAO: Mr Phil O'Donohue, Employee Relations Manager and Mr. John Lynch, Chairman, CIE.

We would also urge you to write to Eugene's union, at NBRU, 54 Parnell Sq West, Dublin 1, FAO: Mr Michael Faherty, Gen Sec NBRU.

Eugene or a member of the campaign will be happy to address any branch or meeting of your union to highlight this case.

Email: [egenmccormack@eircom.net](mailto:egenmccormack@eircom.net)

## Oppose the criminalising of protest

THE TRIAL showed that it is always worth while fighting attempts to criminalise protest.

It seems that the jury felt that such a big trial would not have happened if someone had not done something wrong and so two of the men, James King and Kieran Gallagher were found guilty of minor charges and given a fine of £75 and a conditional discharge respectively.

But on all the more serious charges, including the substantive ones against the nine women, the jury was unanimous in rejecting the prosecution's arguments. For example, Jackie McKenna, had an additional charge of attempted criminal damage for kicking a door while trying to get into Raytheon.

The prosecution tried to argue she wanted to trash the door. She told the jury that she would happily "have eaten the door if it would let me get at the mainframe". The jury believed her.

Charges of assaulting a security officer against two of the women were withdrawn when the security officer did not allege assault and when CCTV footage showed clearly that he was never threatened in any way.

Three men, Brian McLadden, Rory McDermott and John McMonagle were charged with obstructing and assaulting a police officer outside Raytheon while the women were inside.

Their charges were thrown out when defence barristers showed up the policeman leading the case as being a liar trying to cover up the punch another policeman had landed on the face of Rory's pregnant partner, Kaylee.

## Fighting for justice

ONE QUESTION that looms large now that the trial is over is this: since the defence of the women was the same in all essentials as the defence successfully put up by the men two years earlier, what did the Public Prosecution Service think was going to be achieved by charging the second group of defendants?

Looking around Belfast over the three weeks of the trial, at the 25 or so lawyers in their wigs and gowns and squads of court officials standing by, you had to wonder at the expense of the whole futile exercise. And wonder even more at the enormous difficulty put in the way of the family of 15-year-old Thomas Devlin, stabbed nine times in 2005 as he walked home in north Belfast, as they strove to persuade the PPS to bring charges. In the end and against all the odds, they succeeded. Last month, one of Thomas's killers was sentenced to 30 years, his accomplice to 22 years.

Do eighty quid's worth of damage to the premises of a \$20 billion company and you can be certain you'll be hauled into court. But if your innocent child falls victim to vicious sectarian murder, you have to fight all the way for any semblance of justice.



Book Review:

# The Enigma of capital

Author: **David Harvey**Reviewed by **Kieran Allen**

DAVID HARVEY is something of an international phenomenon.

He is the most widely cited geographer in the academic world, yet has spent much of his academic life teaching Marx's Capital.

His lecture course on Capital, which is now available for downloading on DavidHarvey.org, has won an audience of tens of thousands.

His latest book, *The Enigma of Capital*, is written as a summing-up of his theories. It starts with an explanation of the current crash but links it firmly with how capital flows through the system and changes forms.

Capital is a perpetual expansion machine that, roughly, seeks to achieve a 3 percent compound rate of growth each year.

By its very nature the system is fantastically dynamic and innovative but according to Harvey, following Marx, it faces two problems.

First, various 'barriers' appear that stop the self-expansion, including the limits of nature itself, the lack of a trained workforce or a supply of raw materials.

Second, it has a 'realisation' problem. To realise profit on all the commodities it has made, it must sell them.

But sometimes disproportions arise between the different sorts of goods that do not fit with demand.

And sometimes, workers



David Harvey

are paid too little to buy all the goods and services that are available.

Harvey uses the concepts of Marx's Capital to explain all this in clear, original and insightful ways.

But there are weaknesses as well. Like many academics, Harvey dismisses Marx's theory of the long-term tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

This means that his explanation of why there is a shift in late capitalism to 'financialisation' is often quite weak.

He repeatedly points to the growth of the 'state-finance apparatus' and the way the financial sector can extract monopoly rents from other capitalists.

But there is no overall explanation given for why profits from financial speculation now accounts for 40 percent of US profits today as against 15 percent in the 1960s.

Harvey also introduces a 'co-evolutionary theory of social change' whereby activity across different spheres of society are required.

Any revolutionary process will, of course, involve change in all sorts of social arenas but Harvey's point is that struggles at the workplace are not necessarily central to that change.

The workers' movement is rather just one element of a wider anti-capitalist coalition (including NGOs, of which he is rightly critical) that attempts to create 'utopian spaces' or movements of the dispossessed.

If Harvey means that the workers' movement cannot stick to narrow economic concerns but must champion the oppressed, he is absolutely right.

But sometimes this point shades into an argument that claims that a focus on workers' struggles leads to political sectarianism and even the failures of communism.

Despite these criticisms, one cannot but celebrate a book that declares: "The capitalist class will never willingly surrender its power. It will have to be dispossessed."

This man is not just an academic; he is a fighter.

# Engaging the taboo head-on

Film Review: **Four Lions**Director: **Chris Morris**Reviewed by **Sinead Kennedy**

CHRIS MORRIS is a satirist who willingly travels where few others would dare to tread.

His 1990s Channel 4 programme 'Brass Eye' used a spoof current-affairs format to deceive numerous public figures into supplying on-camera support for preposterously fictitious pressure-group campaigns.

The series featured Phil Collins talking "nonce sense"; Tory MP David Ames calling for a fictional drug called 'cake' to be outlawed and making impassioned pleas for a ban on 'heavy electricity' and the comedian Richard Blackwood claiming that "online paedophiles can actually make your keyboard release toxic vapours that actually make you more suggestible".

Morris produced a four-page pullout for the Observer in the wake of September 11, which satirised the hysterical reaction to the tragedy, and has released hilarious, doctored versions of George Bush's speeches on his website.



Chris Morris

For his directorial debut, *Four Lions*, Morris has turned his attention to Islamic fundamentalism.

Unsurprisingly, there has been little comedy made about Islamist terrorism or indeed the 'war on terror'.

The little that does exist has tended to focus on the absurdities of the western stance like *Team America: World Police* (2004) or the far superior, *In the Loop* (2009), one of whose writers, Jesse Armstrong, collaborated with Morris on the script for this film.

Morris, characteristically engages the taboo head-on, focusing entirely on the jihadis, presenting them as buffoons.

They are all hopelessly confused and contradictory, caught between their assimilated lifestyle and righteous ideological fire.

Cell leader Omar is the head of this humbling Northern England jihadist cell, along with the mentally challenged Hassan, the vaguely bewildered Waj, and the conspiracy spouting Barry, a white convert to the crusade against Western debauchery.

Their incompetence is the source of a good deal of very funny verbal, physical and conceptual jokes: it's hard not to laugh at a group of radical guerrillas who communicate via cartoon avatars on a website

called PuffinParty.

The subject matter of *Four Lions* makes inevitable a more explicit engagement with politics than in Morris' earlier work and nobody escapes the satirist eye not even the police: "It must be the target," a police sniper declares after shooting the wrong person, "I just shot it."

However, precisely because it is a Chris Morris film, you expect him to push it further and harder than anyone else, but he doesn't.

The film is strong on slapstick but weak on satire and you are left unsure of what story Morris is actually trying to tell.

Any film that manages to make a group of jihadis, intent on a murderous crusade, essentially sympathetic has to be applauded.

It is the level of emotional engagement that Morris cultivates between the characters and the viewer that is the most unexpected achievement of the film.

The audience, while not exactly relating to the characters, comes to realise that these characters' murderous schemes are no less tragic just because they are absurd.

## Double dealing and gambling with other peoples' money

Book Review: **A Week in December**Author: **Sebastian Faulks**Reviewed by **Paddy Fields**

THIS BOOK, published in 2009, is a satirical look at contemporary urban society through the eyes of seven characters over a period of seven days.

While it is set in London, the characters could be transposed to any so called advanced Western city.

The most interesting character is the hedge fund manager, John Veals, and here Sebastian Faulks has done his homework.

Through this figure, he manages to explain credit default swaps and leverage and describes how Veals makes millions while destroying the livelihood of thousands of African farmers.

The story tells how Veals brings down a large bank by



Sebastian Faulks

bribery, old boy networks, double dealing and gambling with other peoples' money.

The other characters are Veals' teenage son, who seems to live in a world of grotesque reality TV and drugs, with very little human contact.

This alienated youth eventually gets drawn into a Muslim Jihadi organization,

comprising of a female train driver, an unsuccessful lawyer and his schizophrenic brother.

The son was, however, the least well-drawn character and rather implausible.

The paths of these people cross each other in what is a complex and ambitious look at contemporary society.

The overall story is credible,

well researched and very clever, and has been compared to *Bonfire of the Vanities*.

It does not present a socialist perspective or, in fact, any solutions apart from the need for individuals to reconnect from a cyber world.

It is, however, a gripping read and an expose of the obscene wealth made by those who contribute nothing to society.

The book starts and finishes with a dinner party given to promote a Tory minister's finances, when some of the characters come together for various reasons.

The event ends with a drunken attack on the hedge fund manager by one of the other guests who says of all those responsible for this capitalist con trick: "It's a fraud as old as the markets themselves. The only difference it's being done on a titanic scale."



# Socialist Worker

## CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE PUBLIC ASSEMBLIES BILL

# DEFEND THE RIGHT TO PROTEST!

By GORETTI HORGAN

THE CAMPAIGN against the Public Assemblies Bill continues to gather momentum as the word spreads about the Bill's proposals.

Public meetings about the Bill have been well-attended with lively discussions.

There have been few people at those meetings who support the proposals but there have been voices saying that the campaign is 'exaggerating' the impact it could have.

Some suggest that the new legislation is simply an update of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

But the 1998 Act is about marches or parades only. It means that groups have to file application forms with the PSNI for permission to hold a march.

But it is not necessary to file for permission for a protest meeting or rally that does not intend to march. The right to hold such rallies is what is meant by the right to assembly.

Many trade unions, community and women's groups, anti-war

groups and others have called such rallies at a couple of hours notice when something happens – like someone being killed or attacked – or is announced, like the closure of a local leisure centre, old folks home or library.

When the Gaza Flotilla was attacked, protest rallies were organised in Belfast and Derry in less than twelve hours.

What the proposed Public Assembly Bill will do is to ban all such rallies unless permission has been applied for 37 days in advance.

While there is a facility to allow emergency protests, the Bill says it has to be an "extreme emergency" and permission sought in the three days before it is held.

Such permission could be withheld. Currently, we don't have to ask for any permission.

It is true that the Public Order (NI) Order 1987 already contains restrictions on rallies of two or more participants.

But this is only if police have a "reasonable belief" that it will lead to "serious public disorder, or serious disruption to the life of the

community or undue demands to be made upon the police or military forces".

A public assembly can only be banned if the Chief Constable asks the Secretary of State to ban it on the grounds that no amount of restrictions will be likely to avoid such "serious public disorder".

There are other changes, besides the 37 day notice for all protests – for example, anyone organising a march would have to say how many banners would be carried and what each would say.

So, no more imaginative banners and the person who turns up with the "Down with this kind of thing" placard would have to be sent home.

Sinn Fein's John O'Dowd, one of the group of six MLAs (three Sinn Fein and three DUP) that produced the draft Bill, debated the Bill with the SWP's Eamonn McCann on the BBC's Hearts and Minds programme.

There, he denied that the Bill would stop protest against the cuts we all know are coming in public services.

McCann pointed out that the

'Explanatory Notes' that were published with the draft Bill give as an example a community wanting to protest against the closure of a sports facility having to give 37 days' notice. O'Dowd had no answer.

O'Dowd also suggested that those who oppose the Bill don't care about residents having to put up with co-trailing Orange marches through their areas.

This is nonsense. The Bill could be drafted to apply only to such contentious parades.

Further, the draft Bill does little to promote the kind of dialogue between residents and the loyal orders that residents' groups have said is needed.

The Sinn Fein leadership has issued a briefing about the Public Assemblies Bill for party organisers.

It is not surprising that the Sinn Fein leadership felt the need to do this.

Many Sinn Fein members and supporters are horrified at the proposals, which would have fit well with the Special Powers of the old, pre-1972 Stormont.

This attack on the right to protest must be resisted.

All trade unionists, members of community and women's groups etc should ensure that their local SF and DUP representatives know that the proposals will be defied if they go through.

And we need to take to the streets in large numbers to let them know.

Newry and District Council of Trade Unions has organised a protest against the Public Assemblies Bill in Newry on Friday 25 June at 12.30 pm outside Newry Town Hall.

The Derry group is also organising a protest but details are not available yet.

The main protest against the Bill is in Belfast on Sat 26th June, leaving from the Arts College Gardens at 12 and marching to the City Hall for a rally.

The Stop the Public Assemblies Bill Campaign has provided a useful response to the Sinn Fein briefing.

It can be read at: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/topic.php?uid=104617472916202&topic=48>.

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