

Socialist Worker

After 100,000 march against debt...

TELL THE UNIONS THEY MUST OPPOSE THE PROPERTY TAX!



work and various forms of peaceful civil disobedience.

Third, we should commit our unions at workplace level to resist the robbery of our pay packets to collect a property tax. Employers have no right to get information on the value of our houses or who we are living with. So they should not be collecting the property tax.

Saturday 9 February has shown that there is a growing mood to resist austerity in Ireland. But to move the struggle forward we will have to push aside union leaders who put loyalty to the Labour Party ahead of their members.

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Working class flexes its muscles

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Magdalene Laundry scandal

THE turn out on the ICTU 'Lift the Debt' burden was fantastic.

One hundred thousand people took part and showed that they did not believe the government lies about the 'victory' they had achieved on the promissory note.

The vast majority who took part are opposed to the government grovelling to the EU and accepting the huge Anglo debt.

They know that they and their children are 'on the hook' to pay €64 billion of private bank debt.

But if there was a mood to resist among the mass of people who took part on the marches, it was not matched by the leaders on the ICTU.

In one of the most bizarre performances ever seen at a union march, ICTU leader David Begg made a very short statement and then scurried off to leave the stage to musicians and

comedians.

There was no sign of any leadership or direction on where the fight should go next.

But the next day, in the safety of a friendly radio studio, he stated that the ICTU would not be opposing the property tax.

The unions, he claimed, 'broadly agreed with the concept of a property tax' and said that the ICTU would not be joining 'Trotskyist groups' in opposing it.

The reason, he claimed, was that the 'tax was enacted by the parliament. That's a democratic decision. Our business is not to interfere with that.'

Begg, however, is being economical with the truth because neither Fine Gael nor the Labour Party got an electoral mandate to introduce the property tax.

The Fine Gael manifesto explicitly stated that they were opposed to a 're-

cursing tax on the family home.' Labour said they were for a site value tax and allowances for those in negative equity. So far from being a democratic decision, the property tax is based on lies.

It conflicts with the most basic principle long ago enshrined in the American Revolution 'No taxation without representation'.

Labour Hacks

Begg is not speaking for the majority of union members when he claims to broadly support the property tax.

He is rather speaking for the Labour Party hacks who dominate the upper echelons of the unions.

The scandalous attack on the anti-property tax campaign reveals the real intentions of the ICTU leaders.

They only wanted a one day march to 'let off steam' and give themselves cover while they negotiated an exten-

sion to the Croke Park deal which will significantly worsen the situation of workers.

Resistance to a government that will impose even more austerity will have to come from the grassroots.

Where to Next?

There are three main arenas we must prepare to fight in.

First, when the Revenue Commissioners send out letters in March demanding compliance with the property tax, we should refuse to send the forms back. Mass meetings need to be called in areas and a major boycott campaign organised.

Second, we should push for a major day of civil disobedience on 1 May.

The government is trying to intimidate and bully people and we should show we will not accept it.

There should be walk-outs from

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Cork protestors show the way

By JIM O'CONNELL

THE meeting of Cork City Council was adjourned last month following an occupation of the council chamber by more than 100 members of the Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes.

A banner with the words "axe the tax or watch your vote collapse" had been unfurled. Deafening chanting of 'labour, labour, out out out' and 'no way we won't pay' echoed around the chamber.

Explaining their reasons for action in response to the imposition of the property tax local activist John Lonergan said:

"Tonight's protest at Cork City Council has been organised for two reasons: To send out a clear message that there is going to be a fight against the property tax when it is introduced later this year and to mark the cards for the Government parties that their votes will collapse in 2014 if they drive on with the property tax and austerity policies.

"We are ordinary members of the Cork public who have simply decided not to take it lying down



Occupation of Cork CC chamber

any more.

"We have been force-fed five years of austerity. Our household budgets have been cut to the bone. We have just had our child benefit cut and our PRSI contributions hiked.

"We cannot afford to pay a property tax and will do everything in our power to fight it."

Fellow activist Karen Doyle added:

"The Government are manipulating language - this is not a real property tax, it is a tax on our homes. And there is nothing 'progressive' about it.

"Council services will not improve as a result of it - in fact, they will be cut further in the next few years.

"Instead, it is a smash and grab

raid to pay for the bank bailouts and to give the bondholders their pound of flesh.

"We object to the 'choice' about to be 'offered' to us by the Government - sign up for the tax or have it deducted from your wages or social welfare. This is blatant robbery and we intend to resist it.

"We will be calling on people

to refuse to register for the so-called property tax and will join campaigners across the country in organising civil disobedience and massive protests to force the Government to withdraw the tax and the threat of deductions.

"We are protesting at City Hall because that is the place where we find the greatest number of politicians from the Government

parties gathered together in one place.

"And we want to send these politicians and their parties a message that if they drive on with the property tax and with austerity policies they will be decimated in the elections next year.

"As our slogan says: 'Axe the Tax - Our Watch Your Vote Collapse.'"



Saturday's demo in Dublin

Keep the pressure on: FG and Labour, Out Out Out!

By TINA MC VEIGH

LAST week a small but determined group of protestors gathered outside the constituency clinic of Fine Gael TD Catherine Byrne.

We were there to voice our anger at the Property Tax and to call on her to condemn its introduction, as other FG TDs have done.

We unfurled our banners and began the usual chants: Catherine Byrne, hear us clear, we don't want your home tax here!

After a few minutes we decided to take the protest into the lobby of the constituency office.

When we got inside we began our chants again: this brought her out of the back room, in a rage! After trying to physically push us out of the offices, she turned out the lights and walked out herself.

We followed and continued the protest outside, while she was still on the phone trying to get the police to come down.

They eventually did and while they spent a good while talking to her (presumably telling her there was little they could do) we kept up the chanting.

Eventually the Garda came over and told us we could protest all night as far as they were concerned!

We didn't stay all night, but long enough to force Deputy Byrne to close up shop for the night.

This is the kind of activity that we will be doing from now on and I think it is a useful example for groups of activists around the country.

No more hiding behind the gates of the Dáil or the desk of your constituency offices. Answer to the people.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Sligo protest

UP to 150 members of the Sligo Campaign Against Austerity protested on Shop Street on Saturday 2 February.

Representatives of the People Before Profit Alliance helped to organise the demonstration in conjunction with local ULA activists, members of the Campaign Against Property and Water Taxes and members of the campaign against cuts to home help services.

Speaking to Socialist Worker, ULA councillor Declan Bree said that he was "extremely satisfied with the general turn out and the levels of support shown by local people."

"The campaign in Sligo has now taken a firm decision to engage with the public at every opportunity and this involves holding monthly protests on the main street in the town.

"Taking to the streets is the only way for us to build mass support and judging by the mood in Sligo this should be possible around the country".

Gay marriage should be recognised everywhere

By GORETTI HORGAN

THE recent vote at Westminster in which MPs backed a bill to legalise gay marriage in England and Wales was a historic day in the campaign for equality.

Scotland is also to bring in equal marriage rights.

Hopefully, so will the South of Ireland in the near future.

This will leave the North of Ireland as the only part of these islands that doesn't allow same sex couples to get married.

Bad as that is in terms of ensuring equality, another sneaky deal in relation to the rights of women and LGBT people has been done with Westminster by the North's politicians.

This one means that gay marriages won't even be recognised in the North.

The current version of the bill before Westminster means that a couple legally married in England or Wales will have their relationship only recognised as a civil partnership in Northern Ireland!

This ridiculous situation is also dangerous. If we start to allow the



fundamentalists of the DUP to refuse to recognise the legality of a relationship recognised

everywhere else in the UK, will they also refuse to recognise adoptions by LGBT couples?

This is not just an issue for the DUP. Sinn Fein is its partner in government and just as

they would pillory Labour for allowing FG away with such an unjust move, so they should stand up to the DUP and demand equal marriage in the North.

Despite the huge strides forward that have been made in LGBT rights over the last 30 years, homophobia is still officially sanctioned in the North.

That official blessing – from Stormont ministers and countless bigoted politicians – fuels the hatred that leads to gay men and women being physically attacked on the streets.

Just days after the vote for gay marriage at Westminster, gay rights activist and anti-cuts campaigner Terry McCartney was assaulted on the streets of Derry – an attack that led to his death.

If we are going to end deaths like Terry's, we have to do more than get bits of formal equality in a system riddled with oppression and exploitation, we have to get rid of this lousy system and win real sexual liberation for all.

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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 Cameron 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.

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What Socialists Say



'Promissory Note' deal is a farce

WRITING about the rise of Louis Bonaparte in 1851, Marx famously argued that history was bound to repeat itself first as tragedy, then as farce.

Having witnessed the tragedy of guaranteeing billions of Anglo bondholder debt in September 2008, this week we were treated to the farce, as Michael Noonan heralded a 'historic' deal on the €31 billion 'Promissory Notes'.

In September 2008 Sean Fitzpatrick and Michael Fingleton hoodwinked the government into believing their respective banks were merely illiquid (short of cash) when they were actually insolvent (bankrupt). This meant that the disastrous blanket guarantee scheme pushed on the government by the ECB would cost the tax payers €50 billion in Anglo and Irish Nationwide alone.

The Notes got their name from the unconditional promise made by the Irish state to pay private speculators in full for money lent to the bankrupt institutions.

This will still be the case except that now the debts have been even more firmly shackled around our necks as part of an ECB engineered transformation of promissory notes into regular state debt.

This makes it much harder for any Left government to refuse to pay the debts in future and strips the Irish Central Bank of its ability to simply print the €3.1 billion every year.

Noonan's deal merely confirms that tax payers will pick up the tab from 2038 onwards in a game the speculators know is 'heads they win - tails we lose'.

Under the supposed rules of capitalism brave entrepreneurs must be allowed to make private rewards in return for the risks involved in profiteering.

In reality, any losses made by private bankers are always foisted onto tax payers as part of a global strategy to make sure the ruling class never pays. Nothing is more symptomatic of the class nature of the state than this craven attempt to convince tax payers that it is somehow good to pay the gambling debts of private speculators.

Noonan may well proclaim that this is a great deal for the people of Ireland. What he really means is that this is a great deal for the tiny minority who run the 'profit system' at the expense of the needs of ordinary people.

Magdalene Laundries abuse

A REPORT released by Senator Martin Mc Aleese last week confirmed that the Irish State actively colluded with four orders of Catholic nuns to enslave women in Magdalene Laundries.

Over the course of seventy years (1922-1996) more than 10,000 women were shunted into the infamous laundries to work without pay in the most appalling conditions. Survivors speak of intolerable cruelty at the hands of sadists who felt that the poor and destitute had somehow to be punished and made to wash away their sins (being poor and vulnerable).

This modern day form of slavery was actively sanctioned by the Irish state who sent more than 1/4 of all those interned in the laundries to their fates.

Mc Aleese claims to have found evidence that the Religious Orders never made any profits, but this is very hard to believe given that they had thousands of women working for nothing.

Either way, all of the surviving women deserve retrospective payments by the Orders and contributions made by the Irish state to make sure they live the rest of their lives with dignity and material comforts.

Fearing that these costs would be laid at the door of the State, Enda Kenny disgracefully refused to offer an official state apology, merely saying that he was 'sorry for their troubles'.

Seventy years of slavery and not one word of official regret from any government minister. Meanwhile those same ministers can stay up all night to make sure the next generation of Irish women have the debts of the bankers foisted around their necks.

Get out of the Croke Park Talks!



By KIERAN ALLEN

THE government is preparing to launch new attacks on public sector workers. But the leaders of SIPTU and IMPACT are not drawing up any plans for resistance.

Instead, they have entered talks on an 'extension' to the Croke Park agreement.

The government's declared aim is squeezing another €1 billion from the wage bill of public servants – and €300 million is to be extracted this year alone.

But their problem is that the Croke Park agreement is due to continue until March 2014 – a full year to run. So the current talks between the ICTU and the government are about making an existing agreement worse.

It is **unprecedented** for unions to enter such discussions.

Normally they pride themselves on being 'industrial relations professionals' so when an agreement is concluded they insist that both parties stick to it.

When workers object, for example, that they have lost premium payments Sunday working, their own union official will insist that they stick to an agreement.

But now they are discussing with the government how to add extra items to make an agreement worse for workers.

What are these talks about?

The grassroots membership has largely been kept in the dark about what is being discussed.

But from a number of sources it is already clear that the government wants to get some or all of the following measures.

- They want to increase the pension contribution from public sector workers.
- They want to freeze increments
- They want to increase the number of hours being worked.
- They want teachers to take on more substitution duties
- They want to cut back on allowances and premium payments.

Alongside these issues, secret discussions are underway about 'standardising' hours across the public sector.

A vague clause in the existing Croke Park deal is being used to increase the hours of some public servants.

Union leaders have also already accepted a standardisation of holiday entitlements which involve a different cap on holidays for new entrants

The soft cop hard cop routine

The union leaders say that the government will impose compulsory redundancies and pay cuts if they are not in the talks.

This is part of a choreographed game where big threats are issued to get workers to make more concessions. But the union leaders should not be playing the 'soft cop'



for the government.

As soon as they heard that the government wanted to worsen an existing agreement, they should have conducted a national ballot for action.

Addicted to defeatism

The question many ask is: Why do the union leaders not act to defend their members?

The answer is that unions like SIPTU are led by Labour Party members who put the interests of their party ahead of the need to fight for their members.

Other unions such as IMPACT – with which SIPTU forms the main right-wing axis in ICTU – will do anything to preserve a cosy relationship with the government.

Both accept defeat after defeat and encourage a mood of defeatism.

Yet this defeatism mentality only encourages the government to look for more and more. The record speaks for itself.

■ In 2009, the government cut pay and imposed a pension levy. After one mass demonstration and a one day strike, the union leaders gave up the fight.

■ In 2011 the government increased the retirement age to 68 – the union leaders did nothing.

■ The Croke Park agreement was supposed to give some of its 'savings' to those who earned under €35,000 a year. But the government refused to pay out – and the union

leaders did nothing.

No wonder the government now thinks the unions are a push over and are coming back for more.

Get out of the Talks

The union leaders and the government had planned to wrap up the talks very quickly and have a new package ready by early March.

They had hoped to get the deal 'done and dusted' before teacher union conferences at Easter.

But as news of the talks filtered out, pressure grew from the grassroots. Two Garda unions – the AGSI and the GRA – have walked out after they heard proposals for major cuts in allowances.

The INMO were on the point of walking but INO General Secretary Liam Doran bottled it.

The INMO will still walk out, however, if proposals for cuts in weekend pay are not removed.

Pressure needs to be exerted in SIPTU and IMPACT to establish what issues are being discussed.

So far these unions have not involved grassroots members in discussions and have remained tight lipped.

But we also need to put down resolutions to call for a withdrawal from the talks. There is no mandate to enter these talks – and they should stop now.

The working class shows it but ICTU fails to harness it

As more than 80,000 people take to Irish streets in protest, Tina Mc Veigh looks at ICTU's attempts to dampen the spirit of fight back!

Last Saturday saw tens of thousands of people take to the streets in a series of protests organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

People turned out in their droves to oppose government austerity and to hear what they hoped would be fighting words from their union leaders.

The show of strength confirms that there are hundreds of thousands disgusted with the on-going attacks on working people.

However, if you were a union member taking part in Saturday's ICTU protest, you could be forgiven for wondering whether you had mistakenly joined a dress rehearsal for the St Patrick's Day parade. Stilt walkers, brass bands, face painters; comedy and music were the order of this family day out, lending the protests around the country a carnival atmosphere.

However, this was a carnival at which no one was having any fun.

Except for the Union leaders perhaps.

Glib references were made to the hardship being imposed on members, how the unions were not going to put up with any more austerity.

But there was no mention of a 'what's next', no mention of what was to be done about existing austerity or debt burdens, and certainly no call for a general strike!

Essentially the march was de-politicised by the union leadership by turning it into some sort of comedic concert so loud that it drowned out anti-government chants and calls for a general strike!

ICTU Cynicism

In a cynical move, the ICTU had gone to great lengths to ensure that the dissenting voices in the crowds and the presence of the CAHWT were kept to a minimum.

In Dublin, stewards and Gardaí went so far as to corral a large section of the CAHWT contingent.

Joanne Pender from the Kildare CAHWT describes what happened:

'When we got to Merrion Square we were led straight ahead and then the barriers were put up on the road behind us, at which point we saw union flags taking a right turn where we had gone straight on.

'When we reached the top of the street we turned right on to a road that was open to traffic, very surprised we stopped and asked the Gardaí what was going on, we got no answer'.

In fact, reports from all around the country suggest that stewards had been instructed to come down hard on the CAHWT going so far as to collude with the Garda to achieve this.

People were asked by stewards to stop distributing leaflets, prevented from joining the protest at certain points and prevented from collecting donations. As Deirdre Beatty in Dublin put it 'I feel so demoralised.

Call this a democracy? It felt like an exercise in futility, the unions put on a show for lip service.

There was no fighting talk or motivational talk from the unions.

It shows how the ordinary rank and file have to join with the people and not rely on the union leaders for anything!

People may understandably feel a bit demoralised by Saturday's events. However, all of this has to be put into context.

Saturday's day of nationwide protest was in fact a rally called to put pressure on the government to get a deal on the promissory note.

And to give the impression to the rank and file that the union leadership was in fact taking up the mantle of resistance.

Following last November's highly successful protest (organized by the CAHWT and the DCTU) the leadership were under pressure to act.

However, the reality is that the union leaders in Ireland are complicit in the attacks on the



working class.

The Labour party dominate union executives, particularly in SIPTU, the country's largest union. Officials who aspire to move up the union ranks join the Labour party.

The unions, with the exception of Unite and CPSU, do not oppose the property tax – David Begg claims ICTU's support for the property tax is based on the fact that it was democratically voted in by a democratically elected Dail.

Considering the extent to which the Labour party infiltrates the union movement, it is no surprise that they will not oppose the tax or speak out against austerity - other than to pay the kind of lip service that Saturday's fiasco was all about.

Grassroots mobilisation

That is the position of the unions from the top. But we have to analyse Saturday's events from the ground up.

Union members had come out in good faith to voice their opposition.

Home-made signs carried slogans such as 'Abolish Family Home Taxes', 'Where's the Lisbon Jobs' and 'Short Term, Long Term, It's Not Our Debt!'

Placards carried by young people included slogans such as 'Give us Back Our Future' and 'Stop Stealing Our Hope'.

People gladly accepted leaflets being handed out by CAHWT activists.

There was palpable anger among the crowd when they realized there were no fighting words to be heard from the leadership and they were expected to be satisfied with comedy and music.

Once crowds arrived at the staging areas,



they quickly dispersed but as they were leaving, stopped to sign petitions for a general strike at the various CAHWT, Socialist Worker and People Before Profit stalls.

Here they voiced their anger. What had actually taken place on Saturday was a charade, and they knew it.

They had been used by the union leadership to put on a display of opposition.

Hundreds of thousands of euro must have been spent on flags, electronic equipment, comedians, musicians, pre-recorded videos of activists speaking, but no mention made of concrete action, no mention of what happens next.

As one man gruffly put it while walking away from the Dublin stage: 'She's very good, but I didn't come here today to have poetry spoken at me'.

What happened on Saturday was in some ways to be expected. Jack O'Connor had described the ULA and Sinn Fein as 'fascists' following the heckling of a union executive at the November protest.

This weekend David Begg referred to the

CAHWT as a 'bunch of Trotskyites'. Through the Labour party, the unions are in bed with the government and have no intention of fighting austerity, the debt or the class war!

Their job is to vilify the CAHWT so as to discredit this mass movement of grass roots activists.

However, the ordinary members that were there on Saturday carried home-made signs condemning austerity, the government and this latest burden of debt that has been pinned to the backs of every man, woman and child in this country.

The ordinary members that were there on Saturday are part of the 700,000+ households who continue to boycott the Household tax.

They have been hit by pay cuts, pension levies, cuts to public services and now their union leadership are also trying to ram Croke Park 2 down their throats. Real people with real issues.

As Sinead Keighron from Sligo, said 'I am on my first ever protest here today because I am in absolute despair trying to keep three children in college.

My husband and I frequently have to forego food and we haven't had heat in our home for over two years'.

It is the ordinary members we have to focus our efforts on, doing everything we can through the CAHWT to meet them, engage with them and recruit them to the biggest anti-austerity campaign on the ground.

If anything, what happened on Saturday shows how far to 'the other side' Labour have gone and the lengths to which they will go to stay in power.

Shh.... O'Connor, Gilmore, don't mention the class war!

Strength,



On the ground in Cork

By JIM O'CONNELL

Up to 7,000 people took to the streets of Cork on Saturday - all along the route of the protest, marchers and even onlookers joined in the calls for 'General Strike Now!' as well as chants of 'Labour Out!' and 'Bailout the People, Not the Bankers!'.

At the main stage people were addressed by a number of local union executives. When people leaving the area were asked their opinion of the speeches, the responses included words such as "muted" "complacent" and "weak".

Surely this must have been very disappointing for the members of these trades unions who had turned out to show their opposition to the current government and its actions including the recent so-called "deal" on the promissory note?

On the ground in Sligo

By CONOR MCKINNEY

4500 protesters arrived in Sligo, fiercely determined to make their disgust known. Anger at Labour was evident when a local labour activist got up to speak!

Danny Sweeney, who was amongst a group of over 200 who had travelled from Donegal said:

'This is what is wrong with Ireland - Fianna Fail style politics only with a blue shirt and the stolen red shirt of Labour at

the helm. It takes some nerve to stand up there attacking the austerity measures on one hand while his party impose them with the other'.

Brendan Fox, part of a CPSU group from Longford, said 'I am fed up to my back teeth with the pain of austerity and the lies of people who promised a new style of politics while all they have achieved is a dirty deal for gamblers'.

What they said on the streets of Dublin

By RORY O'NEILL and NIGEL HANLON

'This is a load of shit, nothing for the people, and all for the EU. We would like to see a one day strike and we would like to see an end to the Austerity Bill.' (Rose Guilfoyle)

'I am here today protesting against the extreme austerity in this country at the moment and the fact that it's aimed so much at working class people and with these talks going on at the moment (Croke Park II) they are trying to load more and more on us and it's just not fair!' (Sally Maguire, ASTI)

'I'm here because I'm a CPSU worker and we're taking too many hits, we are some of the lowest paid workers in the civil service.' (John Nulty)

'We are out today because of the proposed cuts through Croke Park II and we want to get the message across that the Ambulance service can't afford anymore cut's and as from this stage we are saying NO to Croke Park II' (Mick Dixon, Ambulance Paramedic).

How the State colluded in the Magdalene abuse scandal



By NICHOLA HARVEY

SO, Enda Kenny and his lackeys can stay up through the night to ram 'emergency' legislation through the Dail, copper-fastening billions of bankers' gambling debt on the Irish people, but when he's presented with a 1,000-page report detailing what we already knew - of 70 years of State-sanctioned abuse of vulnerable girls and women in Magdalene laundries - he says he needs "space" and "time" to reflect.

The 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalene Laundries' chaired by Senator Martin Mc Aleese was confined to looking at laundries run by four orders of nuns.

It found about 10,000 women and girls entered them since 1922.

If more institutions had been covered the figure would be more like 15,000.

Irish society has long-known the horrendous, cruel and spirit-breaking nature of these institutions, where mainly young women worked, unpaid, for long hours, carrying out heavy, painful work cleaning thousands of shirts, sheets and uniforms by hand.

The testimonies from survivors heard again since the Mc Aleese report have been nonetheless heart-breaking.

They were the women and girls the Catholic ruling class wanted out of sight - girls leaving foster care or industrial schools; girls and women who were homeless; who had mental disabilities; who had been raped and abused or whose family could not care for them.

Testimony

One woman who called a radio-programme calling herself Mary, said her mother had been committed by her grandmother to the Gloucester Street laundry in Dublin in the 1940s after being raped and left pregnant.

She herself was brought up by nuns in an institution and found her mother when she was 16.

"She was locked up because she was pregnant. She was raped."

Another survivor, Eileen, was sent to the laundry in New Ross in the 1950s when she was 12, her mother having been told by a nun it was a good school.

Days began at 6 am with bread, dripping and porridge with nuns supervising "from a pedestal".

The inmates were forbidden from speaking and when Eileen once did speak, she was made get down on her knees for hours to pray to God for forgiveness.

When she tried to run away once she was brought back and her hair was cut "to the bone".

She cried herself to sleep at night wondering what she had done to deserve being there.

She began to wet the bed and had her wet sheets pinned to her back as humiliating punishment. Eventually she was taken out of there by her sister.

These stories aren't new. But all callous Kenny could come up with was to say he believed the women's stories. "I do believe this is the truth and the Government has a duty to act on the findings of this report." But he would not "rise to the bait of political opportunism."

"On behalf of the State I am sorry that so many women worked and were resident in Magdalene laundries in a very harsh, authoritarian environment," was as much as he could muster.

So, the State regrets it happened but the State's not apologising. It was nothing to do with the State, was the Kenny message. Why?

Cost

While this toxic Government can pour billions into gamblers' pockets it hesitates

at the possibility of taking responsibility for the violence, exploitation and cruelty its predecessors inflicted on these now elderly women.

It was everything to do with the State.

The theocratic,

capitalist State was directly culpable in sending at least 26.5 per cent of the women to these institutions, either through the courts, social workers, health boards or transfers from industrial schools.

The State was then directly involved in funding the laundries, inspecting them and through the Gardai in bringing escapees back.

Hospitals and the Department of Defence had lucrative contracts with them.

Frequently the decision to send a woman or girl to a laundry was made by the authorities because it was "more cost-effective" than providing for her in another State facility, such as the local county home or hospital.

These were seen as worse than merely expendable women.

They were actively unwanted because for whatever reason they did not 'fit' the role devised for women by the State - to provide unpaid labour in the home (while having and rearing the next generation of workers) for a husband who would play his roll as a cog in the new, fledgling capitalist State.

In a Catholic State which further sought to control women, any that didn't 'fit' its plans were best incarcerated and enslaved.

To so bare-facedly lie in suggesting the State didn't know what was happening in these State sanctioned hell-holes is a further abuse of these women.

To now seek "time" and "space" to decide how to respond to the truth is another affront to their dignity.

There are fewer than 1,000 elderly women alive today who survived the Magdalenes.

They deserve nothing less than full compensation for their unpaid labour, pensions for their last few years and an absolute no-holding back statement of abject apology from the State for what it did, and in its obfuscation continues to do, to them.



Mass strike hits Greece

UNIONS in Greece have called a general strike on 20 February against a government clampdown on strikers.

The government had sent police to hand striking metro workers an order to return to work or face prison.

Athens metro workers struck last month against a pay cut for workers in public transport and utilities.

Workers across Greece struck in solidarity with the metro workers.

Rail workers took action on Thursday of last week.

Hospital workers walked out against budget cuts on the same day.

In the end the whole of the public sector walked out for at least part of the day, in a mini general strike built from below.

Many metro workers took the day off to march with them.

"The government is afraid of strikes—why else would they take these measures?" metro worker John Nikolaros told Socialist Worker.

He pointed to the hypocrisy of the government's use of the law.

"They think that everything the government does is legal, and that everything that anyone does against the government is illegal.

"So when the court said it was illegal to increase the electricity price, the government did it anyway.

"But when we went on strike, after eight days they convinced the court we were illegal."

Cops also arrested 35 trade unionists linked to the Communist party for trying



Rail and health workers, among others, struck together on Thursday of last week (Pic: Workers' Solidarity, Greece)

to occupy a government ministry.

The government is weak and lashing out.

Senior figures face investigations over the leaked "Lagarde list" of rich Greeks with Swiss bank accounts.

And the latest round of austerity measures continues to face fierce resistance.

"Greek workers have some of the longest hours, and over the previous three years we've already lost 35 percent of our wages," said John.

"Now with the new cut we lose another 20 percent.

"They can't do this to us and expect us to live.

"People have nothing to do but protest and strike."

Spanish corruption scandal fuels new protests

PRESSURE is growing on Spain's Tory prime minister Mariano Rajoy to resign along with leading members of his cabinet.

They face allegations of corruption.

Spain's El Pais newspaper published documents last Thursday that appear to show secret illegal payments to members of Rajoy's party, the PP.

These date back to the 1990s. Rajoy himself appears repeatedly in the "hidden accounts", which are believed to have been written by the party's former treasurer Luis Barcenas.

Barcenas resigned in 2009 over a separate corruption scandal.

An investigation revealed last month that he had a Swiss bank account containing almost €22 million.

The PP denies the allegations. But few are convinced.

A petition calling for the party leadership to resign was set up on the day of the revelations.

It had close to 900,000 signatures as Socialist Worker went to press.

Protesters surrounded PP offices across the Spanish state on Friday of last week.

In Barcelona 2,000 took to the streets followed by a mass assembly of activists.

This week, even the timid Socialist Party opposition has joined the calls.

On Monday the markets turned against the Spanish government.

The cost of borrowing jumped to its highest level since last year.

A new opinion poll shows that the two main parties now have less than 50 percent support between them.

Activist groups have led struggles to defend health, education and other services at a local level.

They have now called for united action against cuts and for democracy on 23 February.

France declares 'victory' in Mali as food shortages grow

by KEN OLENDE

FRENCH forces intensified their bombardment of northern Mali last weekend. Thirty aircraft took part in bombing raids on at least 20 targets in the mountainous regions near the Algerian border.

Islamist rebels have retreated from the cities to their bases in the Adrar des Ifoghas mountains.

The French hope to smash them before they can regroup.

France's president Francois Hollande flew into Timbuktu last week to celebrate his military's rapid capture of northern Mali's cities. He promised to keep troops in the country "as long as necessary".

Meanwhile British prime minister David Cameron toured the Middle East to justify Western action.

He said in Libya, "Sometimes intervening in other countries is not simply about military intervention or security."

The United Nations adviser on the prevention of genocide, Adama Dieng, says there have "been reports of incidents of mob lynching and looting of properties belonging to Arab and Tuareg communities.

"These communities are reportedly being accused of supporting armed groups, based simply on their ethnic affiliation."

It was widely reported that retreating rebels had burned the library in Timbuktu.

This turned out to be wildly exaggerated.

Invaders

The only major town not held by the invaders is Kidal.

Kidal is still in the hands of rebels from the Tuareg MNLA, which has been fighting for an independent state (see Tuareg people fought for an independent Azawad). This once more gives the lie to the idea that the north was



run by a unified Al Qaida force.

In fact Mali's Islamist rebels are made up of at least three different groups with differing ideologies.

Only one associates itself with Al Qaida.

In any case, as a *Financial Times* article last Monday argued, "Links

between the different [Al Qaida] franchises are often tenuous if they exist at all and many of the groups have emerged from principally regional struggles, sharing a similar extremist ideology and using the Al Qaida label to amplify their message."

The charity Oxfam has warned that food and fuel supplies are running dangerously short for ordinary people in the north.

Arab and Tuareg traders who would normally distribute supplies have fled from ethnic attacks since the French and Malian government forces gained control.

Many traders have had their shops broken into and looted.

Prices in the city of Gao have risen more than 20 percent since the intervention.

Meanwhile French special forces have moved into neighbouring Niger to defend the country's uranium mines.

These supply the bulk of the fuel used by French nuclear power stations.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Protests defy repression in Egypt

by JUDITH ORR

THE military clampdown in Egypt claimed more lives last week.

Mohamed El-Gendy, a 28 year old protester, died of brain injuries in hospital after allegedly being tortured in police custody.

Police and security forces conscripts attacked a demonstration outside the presidential palace on Friday of last week.

Police officers are going to be investigated after video footage showed officers assaulting

50 year old Hamada Saber—dragging him along the road stripped of his clothes.

Demonstrations calling for the demands of the revolution—bread, freedom and social justice—have continued.

The Egyptian economy is in deep crisis and severe prices rises on basic goods are threatened.

At the same time the US has just delivered four F-16 aircrafts to the Egyptian air force, the first of 20.

The US is set to provide €1.5 billion aid to Egypt.

But 80 percent will go to the military.



Mariano Rajoy

That's the same week as the Greek general strike and the Italian general election.

Little wonder that leading bankers fear that the recent period of calm in the eurozone may soon be coming to an end.

US imperialism ten years after the Iraq war

by ALEX CALLINICOS

TEN years ago, bloated with a euphoric belief in its own omnipotence, the United States under George W Bush was preparing to invade Iraq. Where does US power stand today?

The commonplace view is that the US has been humbled and is in terminal decline.

There was a discussion on Radio 4's Today programme last week about whether the US decision to stay out of the war in Mali when France acted is a sign of American enfeeblement.

This view isn't completely wrong. Some people even on the left don't recognise the scale of the geopolitical defeat the US suffered in Iraq.

Yes, the famous "surge" in US troops in 2007-8 and more importantly the political campaign to play on the Sunni Arab minority's fear of Shia domination and to buy off the moderate wing of the Sunni insurgency allowed the US to reestablish the situation in Iraq.

But the US has been politically marginalised in Iraq.

Its sometime client government under Nouri al-Maliki refused to concede the Status of Forces Agreement that would have placed US troops above the law.

So Barack Obama's administration was forced into a much larger scale pullout at the end of 2011 than it had planned.

In Asia the US was able to compensate for its defeat in Vietnam thanks to the 1965 counter-revolution that had already destroyed the Indonesian Communist movement and through its alliance with the rising economic powers of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

But the balance of power in the Middle East has been shifting steadily against Washington. Maliki has aligned



Iraq with Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon. This alignment has been weakened by the Syrian revolution.

But the US lost a key ally when the Egyptian autocrat Hosni Mubarak was overthrown two years ago and has now to deal with a much more assertive

Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Eastwards

These developments have been accompanied by the Obama administration's decision to shift its resources and attention eastwards to address the challenge

posed by China's rapidly expanding economic and military capabilities.

Hillary Clinton said just before she retired last week as US secretary of state, "We will continue to welcome China's rise—if it chooses to play a constructive role in the region."

Mali's history of learning, trade and colonialism

Siân Ruddick looks at how the West African country was at the forefront of civilisation—before it became entangled with Western imperial conquest

MALI is at the centre of the new front in the "war on terror". French forces, aided by the US and Britain, have invaded to fight "Islamic extremism" in the country.

But the region's history, both before and after France's imperial rule, shows that the dynamics of the conflict are not simple.

Before imperial conquest this region of West Africa was at the forefront of civilisation.

The Niger river, which runs through Mali, provided transportation and wealth to the Mali Empire that lasted from the 13th century to the 15th century. The area was rich with natural resources like gold and iron ore.

Then, as today, these resources made Mali attractive to France's colonial and imperial ambitions.

Western rulers portray Africa as uncivilised, naturally corrupt and poor.

But history tells another story.

In the early 16th century Leo Africanus, the Arab traveller and historian, visited Timbuktu. He wrote, "The shops of the artisans, the merchants, and especially weavers of cotton cloth are very numerous. Fabrics are also imported from Europe."

Education

He went on to describe the book trade that made the city the African centre of Islamic education. "The royal court is magnificent and very well organised. The king greatly



honours learning. Many handwritten books imported from Barbary (North Africa) are also sold. There is more profit made from this commerce than from all other merchandise."

The city was a centre of trade in salt, gold, ivory and slaves.

But Western Africa was impoverished by the far more brutal Atlantic slave trade run by European nations.

This stole between nine and 13 million Africans and shipped them across the Atlantic.

Then Western powers carved up the continent.

The French seized the region in 1892. In Mali French troops brutally repressed the resistance of local people. France regrouped, divided up and shifted its West African empire several times.

For example between 1890 and 1899 Mali became known as French Sudan. Mali's modern borders are a product of its colonial past. The French wouldn't grant independence until 1960.

Two military coups took place in March and December last year.

People live in grinding poverty, yet the West only cares about its access to the country's natural resources.

The implied warning is clear enough. Clinton worked assiduously to play on regional rivalries and project the US as the protector of states frightened by the expansion of Chinese power.

The US continues to have a vast military superiority over China. China is now converting a middle-range Ukrainian aircraft carrier for its use.

The US has 11 carrier battle groups, each with terrifying firepower at its command.

The neoconservative historian Aaron Friedberg argues, in his book *A Contest for Supremacy* on the Chinese threat, that Beijing may soon have enough missile strength to make the cost of a US effort to defend Taiwan unacceptably high.

But the sea lanes on which China depends for its manufactured exports and its imports of food, raw materials and high-tech products will be dominated by the US Navy for decades.

So it's true that the US is taking a lower profile in the Middle East. George Friedman of the intelligence company Stratfor argues that this is a necessary corrective to Bush's adventurism (which, incidentally, he supported at the time).

He says that in Obama's decision to let the French do the heavy lifting in Mali, "We can see the American system stabilise itself by mitigating the threats that can't be eliminated and refusing to be drawn into fights it can let others handle."

American imperialism has been weakened by defeat in Iraq and by the Afghan quagmire. But it is very far from finished. The US ruling class sits at the very centre of the global capitalist system.

This makes it particularly vulnerable to the systemic crisis of the past five years.

But this central role and the resources that American capitalism still commands mean that it remains the dominant imperialist power.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Fighting fascism in Greece

by DAVE SEWELL



THE Greek ruling class is keen to deflect people's anger at the cuts and the crisis towards migrant workers. But it doesn't always get its own way.

Anti-racists and Senegalese groups were set to protest on Thursday of this week after a street vendor was killed by a train while fleeing police.

"We accuse the authorities of murder, and demand they stop these racist attacks," said Petros Constantinos of the Keerfa anti-racist and anti-fascist coalition.

Meanwhile some 3,000 nationalists held an annual rally in Athens on Saturday 2 February.

They were marking the anniversary of a deadly skirmish between Greek and Turkish forces in 1996.

They included members of the Golden Dawn and Laos fascist parties. Golden Dawn is a serious threat in Greece, but the Nazis face constant opposition.

"We are not facing a fascist coup in Greece," said Petros. "The Independent newspaper ran an article about Golden Dawn building in schools."

"But they have a lot of problems when they try to do that openly."

Socialist Worker

PEACE FLAGS AS ORANGE-GREEN POLITICS FAIL TO DELIVER



THE Loyalist flag protests in the North have dismayed many who believed that the peace process had ended sectarianism.

Support for the protests has been higher than news reports have admitted - despite the self-appointed protest "leaders" being widely seen as ridiculous figures.

Working class Protestants have good reason for resentment at their situation - although Catholic workers remain marginally worse off.

They see the DUP as having deserted them for a deal with Sinn Fein.

Border Poll

The division has been further sharpened by calls for a border poll. Sinn Fein has raised the issue mainly to reassure party members that the united Ireland project hasn't been abandoned.

The recent BBC poll shows that only a minority of Catholics - and fewer than one in five overall - see partition as an urgent issue.

The day-to-day struggle to make ends meet in the face of job losses, wage freeze and cut-backs is a higher priority for most families.

The competitive mobilisation of "the two communities" under different flags for a vote on the border is the last thing the North's working class needs at the moment.

The flags issue arose when the DUP and the Ulster Unionists distributed thousands of leaflets around Belfast saying that a plan to fly the Union flag over the City Hall on only 17 days a year rather than all year round was an assault on Protestant identity.

The leaflet focused on Alliance Party support for the "designated days" option.

The DUP hoped to expose Alliance as unreliable on the link with Britain in a bid to win back the east Belfast seat which Naomi Long had taken from Peter Robinson in 2010.

Thousands of working-class Protestants had been angered by deepening poverty alongside the opulent lifestyle of the "Swish Family Robinson".

The DUP's response has been literally to wave the flag.



Having played up the issue, the DUP then has had to play down its involvement in the demonstrations.

The result has been to deepen the protesters' sense of abandonment. The implications for the "marching season" are ominous.

The Protestant Working Class

Parties like the Progressive Unionists which say they'll represent Protestant working-class interests better than the DUP are themselves trapped in a contradiction - that there is no Protestant working-class interest separate from the interests of the working class generally. It may have seemed to make sense

40 years ago to see Catholic and Protestant working-class interests as contradictory.

Undoing the effects of generations of discrimination meant striking a new balance.

Conventional thinking saw politics as a zero-sum game - giving to the Catholics meant taking from the Protestants.

This was never an adequate analysis, but it had enough truth to make it seem plausible.

Now it makes no sense at all. There is no solution to the problems of deprived Protestant areas which would not also be the solution in deprived Catholic areas. For this reason if none other, efforts

to build a specifically Protestant working class party will continue to fail.

The Nationalism of Sinn Fein is likewise intended to camouflage its failures on class issues.

Like Labour in the South, Sinn Fein in the North complains that, much as they dislike it, "there is no alternative" to austerity - because standing up to the British Treasury would put overall budget funding at risk.

Labour in the South blames the "Troika". Sinn Fein in the North blames the Brits.

United resistance to austerity can cut across the divisions and counter the sectarianism now spilling out again onto the streets. Orange-Green politics have less to offer than ever.

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Northern Ireland Ban on Gay Marriage