

Socialist Worker

RESIST THE PROPERTY TAX

BUILD A CAMPAIGN OF MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

THE government is getting ready to send letters demanding a home tax. They – and the Fianna Fail led government before them – have already crucified the country by taking €25 billion out of us in taxes and cutbacks.

Now they want us to pay between €200 and €600 a year just to live in our own homes.

Not a single cent of this money will go to improve local services.

The government has cut funding to local government by €520 million and, coincidentally, wants to raise this amount in home taxes.

It is a scam to divert more of our money into paying off bondholders and bankers.

Many people just cannot afford this unjust tax because there is no link with ability to pay.

The home tax is based on 'market value' but this means that someone could be unfortunate enough to be unemployed or a pensioner in a modest three bedroom house in a supposedly wealthy area.

They simply don't have the money to pay an annual property tax of €600.

The home tax is also undemocratic. The Fine Gael party stood in the last election promising that there would be no 'recurring tax on the family home'.

The Labour Party advocated a 'site value tax' that was different to a home tax.

This tax therefore falls foul of the most basic democratic norm of 'No taxation without representation'.



Fear and intimidation

The government's only weapon is to force it through by fear and intimidation.

They have drawn up draconian legislation to allow Revenue to take the tax out of people's pay packets, social welfare, pensions or even bank accounts.

They are outsourcing some of the collection to private companies and giving these companies powers to access people's personal financial details.

And they are threatening big penalties for those who do not pay.

All of these measures have been put in place because the government

is frightened by the huge boycott that occurred against the earlier household charge.

Resist

But no matter how much fear they try to instil in people, they can be beaten by solidarity.

In the next few weeks, anti-home tax meetings will take place all around the country.

Everyone who is opposed to these taxes should attend these meetings, familiarise themselves with the full facts of the legislation and then take an informed decision.

Socialist Worker is urging you to boycott this tax.

That means that you should refuse to send back the home tax forms or give a self-assessment of the market value of your house.

Remember: they need our co-operation to administer the tax because there is no objective way to establish the market value of a house when the housing market has virtually seized up.

If hundreds of thousands of people stand together on this boycott, they will not be able to attack us all.

As well as boycotting, we also need to prepare for a day of mass, peaceful civil disobedience.

The first of May has been named by the anti-home tax campaign as a day when we come on to the streets to disrupt normal life.

We need to prepare well in advance for this day – and set about doing what it takes to defeat this tax and the rotten government that is trying to implement it.

Inside:

Page 3:



The Troika plans to steal our forests

Pages 4 & 5:



Trade Union Special

Page 6:



Eamonn McCann on the retirement of Ratzinger

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MOBILITY AND MOTORISED TRANSPORT GRANTS ABOLISHED

By MEDB NIC CRAITH

A press release on 26 February stated that the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grants were to be scrapped.

This follows a report of April 2011 by the Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, which concluded that restricting the grant to persons under 65 was illegal.

John Dolan, chief executive of the Disability Federation of Ireland, divulged on Morning Ireland that this information has been known by the HSE for the last four years.

Currently 4,700 people receive a Mobility Allowance and 300 people receive a Motorised Transport Grant.

The grant scheme is strictly means tested.

Those in receipt were not sent letters informing them, but learned of this development via the media.

Defending the cuts, Enda Kenny has claimed that the €10.6m cost of running the two schemes could increase to €200m or €300m if eligibility was extended to include those aged over 65.

This is deemed far too high for the government, but they still insist that the cuts are "a not a savings exercise."



Kathleen Lynch Labour Minister of State with Responsibility for Disability

The reality is that €10.6 million will pale into insignificance once the scheme is extended to all those with disability requirements.

The government has offered various paltry alternatives to those affected; such as car parking and local buses.

Yet large electric wheelchairs will not fit on all regional buses. The practical benefits of freedom of movement have not been referred to at all; for instance the advantages of fresh air and socialisation.

Joe Mooney, CEO of Muscular Dystrophy Ireland, has asked Kathleen Lynch, the Minister for Disability, to "begin an immediate review into this decision and find ways to continue this payment to the most vulnerable and excluded in our society."

Ireland has still not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of All Persons with Disabilities; and yet the Dáil will sit late into the night for the sole benefit of the financial elite.

YOUTH PROJECTS ON THE FRONTLINE OF AUSTERITY



By TINA MAC VEIGH (Community Worker at Rialto Youth Project).

LAST week, youth workers across Dublin City came out in protest at funding cuts to projects announced by the City of Dublin Youth Services Board.

These cuts amount to €600,000, and target youth projects in areas such as Rialto, Ballyfermot, Ballymun, Coolock/Darndale, Finglas, the North East and the North West Inner City.

The cuts vary from 2% to 11% in the budgets of the projects targeted.

Despite the rhetoric of last November's Children's Referendum to enshrine a value for children and childhood in the Constitution, the reality is that this government is imposing cuts to services for young people in some of the most disadvantaged communities across the State.

In recent years, most youth work organisations have seen funding cuts amounting to a cumulative 30%.

Some, particularly small specialist organisations, are no longer able to remain open, thereby reducing the selection of organisa-

tions young people can join.

Demands on youth work organisations are also increasing because young people do not have resources within their families, which places even greater pressure on local youth services.

Speaking at Friday's protest at the head offices of CDYSB, Nichola Mooney, Team Leader at the Rialto Youth Project, said: "The cuts will have serious implications for youth work and as a result, young people who find themselves in difficult situations will have less or no support."

"In the long run, this will have a negative impact on communities that are struggling and on wider society".

Ireland already has the fourth highest number of young people who are not in education, employment or training at 18.4% compared to the EU average of 12.9%.

Almost 30% of people under 25 years of age are unemployed and one third of men between the ages of 20 years and 24 years are unemployed.

The youth population is growing, with 18.4% of our population aged between 10 and 24 years.

Alongside this growth, youth work organisations have reported an increased demand for their services as economic recession hits hard on disadvantaged and working class communities.

Fortunately a fight back is imminent.

At very short notice, over 100 youth workers, service users and their supporters from projects across Dublin, engaged in a highly energised protest.

A second protest is already planned for Monday 4 March at City Hall in Dublin: an emergency motion calling on CDYSB to immediately reverse the cuts will be tabled at this month's City Council meeting.

The mood among the workers is to organise resistance to these cuts and to engage with the growing anti-austerity movement.

We can look to Bulgaria to see what we need to do in Ireland - various campaigns and protest movements have unified in massive protests on the streets of Bulgaria and have forced the government out of office.

In Bulgaria, people power is working. It's a reminder for us in Ireland and a warning to those in power.

Child poverty unites Catholics and Protestants in West Belfast

By GERRY CARROLL (People Before Profit activist in West Belfast)

A report released two weeks ago by Barnardos revealed that 43% of children in West Belfast where living in poverty.

In East Belfast the figure was 21%, in North Belfast it was 36% and in South Belfast the figure was 18%.

Well over half of parents in poverty (61%) say they have cut back on food and over a quarter (26%) say they have skipped meals in the past year.

West Belfast is the constituency with the second highest child poverty in the whole of the UK, behind Manchester Central.

These figures are alarming for a number of reasons.

They will leave many people in West Belfast asking what



have the political parties, in particular Sinn Fein, have done to alleviate this unacceptable problem.

The fact is that Stormont is not delivering for working class people and threatens to deepen the roots of poverty in areas like West Belfast.

For example the Bedroom tax will drive thousands of

in the interests of global capitalism and the 1%.

It also lays waste to claims (at the heart of the Flag protests) that Protestants are worse off because of funding being directed towards Nationalist areas.

The fact is that West Belfast is predominantly Nationalist/Catholic with the Protestant/Unionist Shankill also a major part of the constituency.

Across the North it is the working class regardless of their religious affiliations that are being left behind.

The only way to stop the vicious slide of thousands more into poverty is to stop the tidal-wave of welfare cuts being implemented.

Sinn Fein and the rest of the parties in Stormont should tax the rich and use that money to raise the standards of living for those at the bottom of society.

Hospital electricians on strike

By TINA MAC VEIGH

SEVEN electricians at St. James' Hospital in Dublin's inner city (members of the TEEU) have been on strike since 19 February in a dispute relating to Health and Safety at the hospital.

Three electricians were suspended on pay last October for locking access to electrical panels in the hospital.

This was done to prevent unqualified staff from resetting the systems after electrical overload.

If managers reset the system, rather than allowing electricians to test equipment for faults, this endangers the safety of staff and patients at the hospital.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Authority found a lack of compliance with electrical health and safety regulations at the hospital which vindicates the electricians' actions.

But rather than go directly to the Labour Court, management are determined to proceed with disciplinary action up to and including dismissal of the workers.



According to one of the strikers, the issue of locking the panels is something so basic it could have been resolved in an hour, if the electricians had been consulted.

Instead, they were suspended. Shamefully, SIPTU did not turn up to an ICTU strike meeting, and voting papers have not been issued to other union members in the hospital, delaying a ballot in support of the electricians' strike.

The workers are unsure what lies behind the hospital's determination to proceed with disciplinary hearings.

However they are confident they will be vindicated if their case makes it to a Labour Court hearing currently scheduled for Monday 11 March.

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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 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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BRIEFING DOCUMENT

CROKE PARK 2:

A disaster for workers

By KIERAN ALLEN

Croke Park 2 is the worst ever deal negotiated by union leaders. It will undermine long standing rights that workers won decades ago.

It is promoted by union leaders who want to help their friends in government. We need a union leadership that is willing to fight for our rights – not sell us out.

The original Croke Park deal has another year to run and was not due to expire until June 2014.

Yet the union leaders allowed the government to tear it up and put an even worse one in place. If accepted, this will set a terrible precedent for the future.

Croke Park 2 proposes to do the following:

1 Make staff work longer to get rid of more public sector jobs:

Those who work 35 hours or less now have to work for 37 hours. Those who work for more than 35 now have to work for 39 hours. These longer hours exclude all rest breaks and are described as only the 'minimum'.

Currently, half of all local authority staff work 34 hours. Nurses fought a huge battle to reduce their hours – but they will be put back again to 39 hours.

Teachers must give more than 2 hours and fifteen minutes to cover supervision and breaks.

The extra hours can be used to change rosters and the working day of health workers will expand from 8am to 8pm.

Teachers and nurses regularly work hours that are not recognised by their employers, but rather than pay them for these hours the government wants even more.

All of this means a cut in the hourly rate of pay.

The government aim is to cut another 10,000 jobs from the public sector and so a vote for Croke Park 2 is a vote from more job losses.

This is the last thing we need in a country with mass unemployment and emigration.

2 Give your employer a free hour's overtime:

Many lower paid workers depend on overtime to survive. But these proposals will slash their earnings.

Those who already work 39 hours will have to do a free hour for their employer – representing another pay cut of between €13 and €20 for many.

Overtime rates are also being cut, with those below €35,000 being paid at the first point of their pay scale. Those above €35,000 will only be paid time and a quarter as against the traditional time and a half, and time and three quarters after 12pm on Saturdays.

To make matters worse, the overtime rate will be lower again because it will be calculated on a longer working week e.g. 39 hours rather than 35.

3 Pay and Allowance Cuts:

Inflation is running at 2% at the moment but wages are frozen until 2016.

That makes seven years of a pay freeze – even though prices of basic items like food are rising. Bills for the property tax will arrive in March. Next year, there will be water charges. But still pay is frozen.

On top of that, the traditional double pay for Sunday is being cut. This was won by workers decades ago – but once it is given up it will never be returned.

Anyone who earns over €65,000 will have their pay cut by 5.5% or forced to drop back



Frontline workers listen to the leaders of the 24/7 Alliance at the National Stadium in Tallaght

a half incremental point – even though they were promised no pay cuts. These cuts also apply to people whose allowances bring them over this figure.

4 Increments are frozen.

Fine Gael back benchers have mounted a campaign against workers who receive an increment for years of service.

Now they will freeze increments for three or six months at the lower ends and up to three years for higher earners.

5 Give the state 6 days free labour.

If you are at the top of your pay scale, you have to give your employer six days free labour.

Or else you take another pay cut. On top of all of this there is even more **management by stress** as bureaucrats get power to intimidate workers. Specifically,

■ They can re-deploy workers up to 45 kilometres to another post in the public sector.

Where some refuse to take a 'comparable' post, they can be disciplined. Workers can be re-deployed beyond 45 kilometres in some circumstances as long as management 'consult'.

There is also provision for the 'voluntary' departure of surplus staff.

■ Every worker will be put through a performance review. Individuals will then be 'identified as having performance issues' and given targets to achieve.

Where they fail to meet these targets, 'dismissal from the public service will be actively pursued'. This is a management charter to create more bullying and victimisation.

■ Flexitime is being curtailed. It will be limited to a maximum flexi period of one day and management can restrict it further.

Outsource and Threaten

Management's are using the economic crisis to outsource many public service jobs. Croke Park 2 gives them great scope to do this.

They only have to evaluate a 'service plan' by in-house staff. They can then use a number of excuses to allow outsourcing, including cost, quality and services. As long as they have 'consultation' – not negotiations – they can push ahead with outsourcing.



Minister for Cuts Labour's Brendan Howlin

Don't vote for bigger dole queues

€25 billion has already been taken out of the Irish economy and unemployment is at an all-time high. But the government wants to take another €1 billion from public sector workers.

Yet the more that earnings are cut, the less spending power workers have. The less they buy, the more other workers are made redundant. Attacking the majority of people is not only wrong – it is economic madness.

The Alternative

The ICTU is being led by a leadership who have more loyalty to the Labour Party than their own members.

Their only response to the economic crisis has been to spread defeatism and demoralisation.

When the government cut public pay by 15%, they mounted a token protest and then surrendered.

When the government broke the Croke Park 1 agreement and refused to give savings gained from extra productivity to those earning under €25,000, they did nothing.

When the retirement age for those under 50 was raised to 68, they barely said a word.

The government and the employers have learnt that the ICTU is weak with a sell-out leadership. So naturally, they come back to workers for more and more concessions.

We need to call a halt to this retreat.

We should

- 1) **Vote No to this agreement**
- 2) **Demand the resignation of union leaders who cannot or do not want to fight.**
- 3) **Prepare for national co-ordinated strike action with other unions to prevent this government imposing any more cuts in earnings.**

What is really going on in the trade union movement?

As Union leaders continue to appease the government, former Deputy President of the Civil and Public Services Union, Conor McKinney, outlines two key developments that have helped to undermine the organised labour movement since the 1980's.

HOW often have we heard the refrain, 'the Unions have let us down again'? It has been a constant complaint in every workplace, in every meeting and at every protest since the crisis began.

So, what is really going on in the Trade Union movement?

Why have they failed to stand with their members and those who cannot find work over the last four years?

Why does the leadership of the Trade Union movement appear to be increasingly docile while their members pay and conditions are torn to shreds? It is my belief that the current leadership of the Trade Unions are simply ill-equipped to deal with the current crisis.

Moreover, if we examine the decline of the movement over the past thirty years or so, it becomes clear that there are two key factors that have contributed to this state of affairs.

Careerism

Firstly, the shift from the promotion of members through the ranks of the Unions to the employment of outside careerists can not be underestimated.

This change of direction started in the 1970's (when workers frequently exercised their right to withdraw their labour) and became the norm after the British trade union movement had been routed in the early 1980's.

As part of the background to this development, the Irish media and political establishment adopted the Thatcherite strategy of ridiculing Union leaders for their working-class regional accents or their lack of grammatical finesse.

This was clearly a class oriented attack on working class leadership and the tragedy is that Union members sometimes fell for it.

Adopting this model of trade unionism has contributed to a bunch of highly paid opportunists running the movement from plush offices in the most affluent areas of our cities.

'Partnership'

The second key factor was the advent of Partnership. Not only did workers find themselves with the wrong people 'representing' them - now the careerists were handed a golden opportunity to establish percentage pay increases that would widen the gaps between the workers they represented and themselves.

The outcome of all this was that General Secretary's and their professional staff were receiving pay increases that were multiples of the people they represented and, as the gap grew, the distance between their understanding of workers lives became impossible to bridge. At best today's



Conor with his daughter at a Sligo Workers Alliance Protest in 2010

other senior official will attend the Branch AGM of these 'activists' and speak highly of their dedication to the Branch members while they will rarely attend an AGM of a Branch that is posing difficult questions for them.

Action: Challenge these fraudsters for their positions in your Union's hierarchy. It is often the case that representatives have held on to positions for way too long.

Insist on a policy of rotation and a Branch culture that mentors newcomers.

Tactic Three - They favour dormant and inactive Branches by increasing their delegations to Conferences (under the rules, usually the ultimate decision making body of all Trade Unions) and make it difficult for active or militant Branches to get a full compliment of delegates to the same body. Action: Ensure that your Branch is fully represented on all decision making bodies within your Union.

Tactic Four - They plant motions to Conference or to the Executive through their cronies from inactive Branches who rarely use up their allocation of Motions.

Action: Insist that your Branch influences the direction of your Union by using its full allocation of Motions to Conference.

This will ensure that no unused Motion can be manipulated to benefit a policy that is detrimental to your members.

Tactic Five - It is not unusual for Branch ballot papers, particularly within the larger Unions, to arrive mysteriously in Head Office without members having had the chance to vote. Action: Insist that you get to vote and that a proper and transparent record is kept of your Branches returns.

Tactic Six - It is commonplace that senior professional staff remain aloof from their members which creates an 'us and them' culture. Action: Interact with your General Secretary and Industrial Relations Officers in person when the opportunity arises and by email if you are geographically restricted from doing so.

Remind them of the democratic structure unique to Trade Unions, whereby a Union is the equivalent of an upturned pyramid with the Members on top, the professional staff at the bottom and with committee's in between to filter instructions downwards.

All of this is premised on you becoming a member of your Union if you are not currently and becoming active if you are. Remember, there exists already a mass movement to support workers and their families.

We can take our Unions back. So, let's get on with it.

Union leaders only think they can identify with the pain and suffering of ordinary people.

At worst they are more interested in their own personal positions.

I'll let your readers make up their own minds on which of these is the more likely.

Now some may feel that this is very depressing. But the good news is it can change very quickly. Below is a series of tactics used by the careerists to maintain the status quo alongside a series of actions that union members can do to oppose them.

Maintaining their power

Tactic One - They hide behind a statistic that Trade Union membership has grown by 10% over the last 15 years.

Action: Call them out on the real stat that Union membership has collapsed from a penetration level of 59% (c.600,000 members out of 1,050,000 employed) to a level of 34% (c.650,000 members out of 1,800,000 employed) in the period referred to.

Tactic Two - They favour 'activists' who are only in 'the game' to line their pockets with expenses and to attend junkets as a way of avoiding the workplace.

It is common that a General Secretary or some

Property tax protestors show the way

By TINA MAC VEIGH

SINCE the Property Tax was announced in last December's budget, the level of protest around the country has increased dramatically.

Everywhere Hogan and Kenny go they are greeted with chants of 'No Way, We Won't Pay'.

In the last few weeks alone, protesters filled the streets of Kells to greet Kenny when he turned up to have a night out with his wealthy pals in the Chamber of Commerce.

protestors blocked Kenny's path in Letterkenny as he tried to enter the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly

Hogan had to abandon plans to speak at a conference of plumbers hired to install water meters.

Richard Bruton was met by protestors as he arrived at an event in the Savoy Hotel in Limerick

Joan Burton had to abandon a speech she was due to give at a

shopping centre in Dundalk.

These are just a few examples of CAHWT protests that are becoming almost daily news.

Alongside these protests occupations have taken place in Council Chambers, TDs constituency offices and Revenue Offices.

The occupations of council meetings across the country have disrupted proceedings and in some cases have forced meetings to close. After the occupation of Catherine Byrne's FG Constituency Office she threatened to resign.

The offices of Price Water House Coopers (PwC) were also occupied as they are one of the leading financial services companies in an industry that designs aggressive tax avoidance schemes.

Thanks to PwC, Google Ireland paid a mere €69.91 million in tax between 20005-2009 on a turnover of €47.44 billion - a rate of just 0.14%.

Meanwhile ordinary families are being hit again and again.



Shift in Tactics

These occupations represent a shift in the campaign as we begin the job of building a campaign of mass civil disobedience that started with the

boycott of the Household Tax and will have to end in a General Strike.

Civil disobedience is a legitimate form of protest but we must ensure that we get big numbers to support

it. Boycotting the Household and Property Taxes, occupying Council chambers, occupying TDs' offices, blocking roads - these are legitimate and peaceful acts of civil disobedience that will need to rapidly increase over the coming weeks and months.

March 23 will see a national day of action in the Campaign Against the Home and Water Taxes. This has to be used as an opportunity to up the ante even further. Last week 100 youth workers blocked a road in Dublin for about twenty minutes, in protest at the savage cuts to their project funding.

This government wants to introduce an unfair and double tax which will impose further hardship on millions of ordinary people.

The lengths they are prepared to go to - taking it from our wages, our pensions, our social welfare payments - are reason enough to push back even harder until this tax is defeated.

Good riddance to Vatican's 'Chief Protector'

By EAMONN MCCANN

THE resignation of Pope Benedict was presented as a piece of poignant theatre - the world-weary pontiff retiring to live out his days in prayerful contemplation while the faithful thronged to bid him a fervent farewell.

Powerful interests all over the world sent statements of respect and reverence. News footage of his helicopter departure from the Vatican wasn't accompanied by a symphonic soundtrack, but it might as well have been.

Outgoing Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti was "saddened and greatly shaken".

Angela Merkel had "the highest respect for the Holy Father."

Barak Obama extended his "appreciation and prayers on behalf of Americans everywhere." David Cameron reckoned Benedict "will be missed as a spiritual leader to millions."

Enda Kenny praised "decades of leadership and service." And so on and on.

None dared mention the sex-abuse scandals or fraud and financial criminality or acknowledged the cauldron of bitterness, division and hypocrisy which seethes within the Vatican.

The closest mainstream media came to the truth were references to Benedict's "mishandling" of the torrent of child abuse revelations which steeped his pontificate in poison.

But it wasn't mishandling. Benedict did his deliberate, relentless best to protect the criminals and hide their crimes.

Far from being other-worldly, he



knew well how to manoeuvre and manipulate for nefarious ends.

This is the man who tried to use the Vatican's phoney status as a State to confer diplomatic immunity on US clergy wanted for questioning about sexual savagery towards children.

He put millions of lives in jeopardy by insisting that using condoms didn't decrease but actually increased the risk of HIV infection.

He described homosexuality as "disordered", homosexual acts as "an intrinsic moral evil." He set his face like flint against the idea of equality for women and smeared those who'd chosen abortion as murderers of children.

The effect of his interventions was to boost homophobia and besmirch the fight for women's liberation.

There is a pattern to all this. The hatred of gays and women and cruelty

to children wasn't an aberration, but the product of a twisted sexuality and the authoritarian disregard for human rights that comes with a conviction that you speak for God.

The talk now is of the new Pope and the difference he might make. But there will be no fundamental difference to the power and politics in the earthly world around us. That after all, is the point of the papacy.

Assembly moves to further restrict abortion rights

By GORETTI HORGAN

THE DUP and SDLP have shown gross hypocrisy in their latest move to prevent women accessing their legal right to abortion when their health is at risk as a result of pregnancy.

Paul Girvan of the DUP and Alban Magennis of the SDLP have tabled an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, which has almost completed its path through the Assembly, making abortion illegal except on the NHS. It is not designed to combat privatisation of the NHS - NI's politicians have no problem with that.

After all, in the same week as the amendment was unveiled, it was revealed that the Dept of Health has paid £130m in the last three years to private healthcare firms.

The point of the amendment is to stop the Marie Stopes Sexual Health Centre in Belfast from performing legal abortions for women whose physical or mental health is at "severe" risk of "permanent or long-term harm".

Such women cannot generally access abortions on the NHS in NI.

Some hospitals have doctors who are willing to risk having to justify the



abortion in a court - but those doctors are few and far between.

Most women whose health is at risk because of cardiac or renal problems, congenital conditions, hypertension etc are told the pregnancy can be 'managed', meaning they won't die in the next year or two.

But the women are forced to go to England if they are very concerned

about their health and want to end the pregnancy.

This is a different situation to the South, where abortion is currently legal only when a woman's life, as opposed to health, is in danger.

However, most politicians in the North don't seem to recognise this.

Even Sinn Fein which, to its credit, has opposed the amendment argues the

case as if abortion is only legal in the North when a woman's life is in danger - with lots of references to the death of Savita Halappanavar.

The language of the amendment says a lot: "... any person who ends the life of an unborn child at any stage of that child's development shall be guilty of an offence and liable...to ten years' imprisonment and a fine...[unless] the act or acts ending the life of an unborn child were lawfully performed at premises operated by a Health and Social Care Trust".

No mention of the woman, who doesn't seem to matter to these religiously-motivated politicians.

This issue unites Protestants and Catholics on either side of the debate about women's rights. The amendment has caused outrage as it is closing down any debate on the issue by essentially forcing a new abortion law into NI at only a few days' notice.

In response pro-choice activists have been out on the streets again, where they've received a lot of support - even from people who are not 100% pro-choice. Many agree we need a real debate about a decent law, not more restrictions.

STATE DENIES BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

By NICHOLA HARVEY

TRANSGENDER woman Lydia Foy who won her landmark case for gender recognition in the High Court six years ago has been forced to reissue proceedings against the State.

In 2007 the High Court ruled that Foy's Human Rights had been breached as she was not entitled to a birth certificate confirming that she was a woman.

Seven years on and nothing has changed.

Ireland is now the only country in Europe that refuses to recognise the acquired gender of transgender people.

This leaves one of the most vulnerable groups in our society without the basic dignity of equality.

There are only about 300 transgender people in Ireland. Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, has promised several times that the legislation would be introduced.

However unlike banking legislation that can regularly be



rushed through in a matter of days, this legislation has never materialised.

It is clear the stumbling block is the Irish ruling class's continued affection for its view of the 'family' where sexuality is to be controlled and directed towards making and rearing the next generation of wage workers.

Any group whose life does not fit this family-centric, worker-producing model is to be abhorred and certainly not accommodated.

As socialists we must stand with Foy.

A qualified dentist who had been married with two children, she lost her career and her family after she finally underwent gender realignment in Britain in 1992.

She had tried, she says, to ignore her sense that she was a woman but suffered breakdowns, had attempted suicide and was diagnosed in the end with gender identity disorder.

She now lives on welfare and describes herself as "lonely a lot of the time" but says she is at peace with who she is.

She has however been impoverished and shunned because of who she is.

The State must afford her the dignity of recognising who she is and we must demand that it does.

Irish children bearing the brunt of austerity

By NICHOLA HARVEY

THE most unforgivable aspect of ruling class austerity has been its impact on Irish children.

Figures just published by the Children's Rights Alliance - an umbrella group of about 30 organisations including Barnardos and the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children - indicate just how intolerable the savage reign of cuts has been.

Almost nine per cent of children in Ireland are in consistent poverty and almost 20 per cent are at risk of poverty.

Consistent poverty means not

having a second pair of shoes, not having meat or an adequate substitute every day or not being in a home that is warm.

It regularly means being cold and hungry and almost ten per cent of Irish children live like this.

Households with numerous children are more likely to experience consistent poverty, but the children of lone parents are most at risk, with a staggering 56 per cent of households headed by lone-parents falling into this category.

Budget 2013 showed no let-up in the austerity assault on the most vulnerable: Child Benefit was cut for the fourth year in a row; the Back



to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was almost halved while Maternity Benefit was brought into

the tax net.

Now there is talk of "reforming" Child Benefit - i.e. cutting it further.

The Mangan Report for the Government's 'advisory committee on tax and social welfare' recommends slashing it to €100 a month per child and investing more in services like child-care and early-intervention family support services.

In reality none of this is likely to materialise.

The ruling class record on fulfilling every child's right to socio-economic well-being is abysmal.

We must stand with children's rights groups against government plans to further attack our children.

General strike paralyses Greece



Striking Greek workers march through Athens (Pic: Workers Solidarity)

by DAVE SEWELL

A general strike paralysed Greece on Wednesday 27 February. The action was against new attacks on workers' wages and their union rights.

Workers in Athens told Socialist Worker that the strike saw the biggest march there for a long time.

"It took more than an hour for the back of the march to catch up with the front," said civil service worker Tiana Andreou.

"The government is being much more aggressive with these attacks and that's why people feel so angry."

Print worker Dimitrios Argyrokastritis said his workplace and lots of others were shut down completely.

"Lots of rank and file workers organised themselves to come on the demonstration when the union leaders did nothing," he said.

The government is trying to push through new austerity measures it agreed with its creditors last November.

Like in Ireland these creditors are the European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank — known as the "Troika".

The austerity measures include huge wage cuts in public utilities and job losses across the public sector.

The government also wants to abolish national bargaining in the private sector. This would give firms the right to slash wages and sack workers without negotiating with unions.

Worried

In Hania, Crete, the teachers' union led a march of thousands. "The government is very worried," said teacher Margarita Papamina.

"For three years politicians have

passed measures in parliament but not been able to implement them because of workers' resistance.

"They couldn't close the schools and hospitals that they wanted to. They weren't able to privatise the state electricity company.

"They know the resistance is growing everyday so they are trying to terrorise the movement."

In Margarita's union seven teacher activists could lose their jobs after the police accused them of violence for taking part in demonstrations and occupations.

Teachers led the demonstration with a banner in their defence. "It is not about violence, said Margarita. "It is an attempt to attack the unions and the parties of the left.

"But workers are not afraid—we want to answer these accusations with more strikes."

The government says it has no

room for concessions on its austerity programme and is considering further restrictions on workers' rights.

It has already clamped down on the right to strike, threatening striking workers on ships and the Athens metro with prison.

But workers' resistance has forced the government to delay some attacks.

Local government worker Costas Fininis said, "Every time the government makes a new austerity deal they tell us things will get better.

"They say we shouldn't strike because better days are coming. But we know that's not true. They are driving us to chaos, so we raise our voices and we strike.

"We are putting pressure on our unions to call longer strikes. We want workers to take control of public services ourselves, instead of this parasitic government."

Italian election stalemate is a rejection of austerity

EUROPEAN stock markets panicked as results of last month's Italian general election were announced.

A stalemate between the centreleft and centreright blocks threatens instability—and a government that cannot implement austerity.

Silvio Berlusconi, the billionaire former prime minister, failed to get re-elected.

Mario Monti, the unelected technocrat who replaced him, came a distant fourth.

His year of cuts has made him popular with other European politicians, but not with Italy's workers.

An alliance led by Labour-type social democrat Pier Bersani, scraped into the lead.

But it falls far short of a majority in the senate.

The only party with anything to celebrate was the left wing, anti-corruption, Five Star Movement.



Five Star leader Beppe Grillo

Led by former comedian Beppe Grillo, this new party picked up a quarter of the votes.

This is more than any other single party.

A government had yet to be formed as Socialist Worker went to press.

But a minority government or a broad coalition would struggle to implement the stability and austerity the markets and European establishment are demanding.

Expect a flare-up of the Eurozone crisis any time soon.

Bulgaria's PM is forced out

MASS protests forced the resignation of Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov's government on Wednesday 20 February.

Protests began at the beginning of the month as people gathered at local branches of electricity companies and burned their bills.

For many their bill had doubled.

They moved on to burning police cars in the largest demonstrations since the fall of Communism.

Some utilities companies announced they would charge €25 to consider revising a bill. Protests broke out in 35 cities and two people set themselves on fire.

Protesters say there is a corrupt

relationship between the electricity firms and the state. They accuse politicians of covering it up.

Less than 24 hours before resigning Borisov promised that he would stay.

Mass protests soon put an end to this across the country.

As the crisis deepens the potential for explosive episodes is increasingly rapidly.

Socialists have to be ready for such explosions and this means building networks of activists who can give focus to mass anger.

The work starts now. Bulgaria shows the way.



Boyko Borisov



For more in depth analyses see: <http://www.swp.ie/content/special-report-bulgaria-rises#sthash.s233boto.dpuf>

NEWS IN BRIEF

A human tide rises against market 'coup' in Spain

THERE were huge demonstrations against cuts in cities across Spain on Saturday 23 February.

Tens of thousands marched against the "coup d'etat of the markets" on the anniversary of a failed military coup in 1981.

The demonstrations were called by the mareas, or "human tides".

These organisations are inspired by the 15 May Indignados movement that burst onto the streets in 2011. The mareas help trade unions and other supporters organise local protests in different sectors.

So there is a "white tide" against health cuts and privatisation.

Also a "green tide" to defend schools and a "purple tide" demanding women's rights—especially access to abortion.

And on Saturday the tides all came in together in a human tsunami of protest.

General strike shuts Indian cities

TENS of millions of workers struck across India on Wednesday and Thursday of last week as its government prepares to pass a harsh austerity budget.

Prices in India are rising quickly—especially for fuel.

But the government wants to cut welfare, make it easier for bosses to fire people and open up more of the economy to foreign investment.

India's economy is slowing down and growth is set to hit a ten year low of 5 percent this year.

The two-day strike was the biggest since India's independence.

It was backed by unions linked to all the major political parties—including the Congress party who are in government and the hard right BJP.

It was particularly strong in public transport and banking.

Cash machines across the country ran out of money, including in the financial capital of Mumbai.

Factories, government offices and schools were shut down. Strikers occupied railway lines.

Some of the Indian media has tried to portray the strike as a failure, but bosses say it has cost them more than €2 billion.

Socialist Worker

HANDS OFF OUR HOMES

PUBLIC housing in Northern Ireland is under attack.

The Con-Dem coalition is introducing a cut for those receiving Housing Benefit who they deem to have a spare bedroom.

Meanwhile locally, Nelson McCausland wants to privatise the Housing Executive.

Bedroom Tax

The Tory-led Westminster government has declared war on the poorest in our society, seeking to make them pay for the tax cuts they are giving to millionaires.

From April they want to cut housing benefit for anyone they believe has a spare bedroom – a 14% cut for one bedroom and 25% for two or more bedrooms.

The callous nature of these cuts is shown in how they decide whether someone has spare capacity. For example, children under 10 are expected to share, as are children under 16 of the same gender.

The Coalition expects people affected by this bedroom tax to either pay up or move. In Northern Ireland there are estimated to be 32,000 households affected by this tax.

There plainly aren't the properties available for all these people to move to smaller homes.

The Coalition knows this – that is why it is simply taking money from the poorest.

This bedroom tax has not yet been implemented in NI but is part of the Welfare Reform Bill currently being considered by the Assembly.

At the end of last month the Assembly's Social Development Select Committee reported that they oppose its introduction.

NIHE Privatisation

Back in January, under cover of the "Flags" protests, Nelson McCausland, Minister for Social Development, issued a statement announcing that the Housing Executive is to be taken out of the public sector.

At the end of February he finally went to the Assembly to give more information on his decision.

He mainly repeated what he had already said but did make it clear why

he is privatising the NIHE.

On two separate occasions he told the Assembly: "...it is important that we make sure that, whatever form it takes, the landlord function has the confidence of the financial institutions so that we get the benefit of drawing in private sector money".

McCausland, backed by all the other parties in the Executive, has a vision of mortgaging NIHE homes to private finance, via housing associations. In practice this will mean rising rents for tenants.

Already housing association rents are on average £30 higher per week than the NIHE.

McCausland says there will be "full consultation" on his proposal but at no point does he mention tenants.

If his proposal goes ahead tenants must have the right to vote on whether they want their homes mortgaged to the banks.

Fight-back

Fortunately workers and tenants have already started organising to fight these cuts and privatisation.

In January, NIPSA organised protests outside NIHE office across Northern Ireland including 300 in Belfast. Meanwhile Strabane District Council has voted to oppose the Housing Executive privatisation.

Across Britain tenants and others will protest against the Bedroom Tax in the coming weeks.

As Socialist Worker went to press Hands Off Our Homes protest meetings were being organised in Belfast and Derry (see across).

These meetings and protests are important starts and can lead to a campaign that can stop both the Bedroom Tax and privatisation of the NIHE.

Joint campaigns of trade unions and tenants stopped council houses being privatised in Birmingham (2002) and Edinburgh (2005).

These attacks can be beaten by tenants and trade unionists united together and fighting the Tories in Westminster and their lackeys in Stormont.

For more information on the Hands Off Our Homes Campaign contact (07596) 114612.



NIPSA members protest outside the Department of Social Development, in January 2013

PUBLIC MEETING
14TH MAR 2013
8PM @ CITY HOTEL

HANDS OFF OUR HOMES

hosted by People before Profit

RESIST THE BEDROOM TAX
STOP THE PRIVATISATION OF THE HOUSING EXECUTIVE

Inside

Page Two:



West Belfast has second highest Child Poverty rate in the UK

Page Six:



Stormont wants to further restrict abortion in Northern Ireland