

Socialist Worker

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ENOUGH IS ENOUGH LET'S GET BACK TO STRONG UNIONS

THE CWU are absolutely right to strike. An Post management think that if they act like Rambos, they will get compliance with their every demand.

The huge 91 percent vote for strike action and the one-day strike on Dec 8th shows they have come up against a brick wall of resistance.

And it is no wonder. SDS has been closed down with the loss of 270 jobs.

This now clears the field for global multinationals like UPS and FedEx to fleece people with high charges

An Post's decision not to pay the 5 percent under Sustaining Progress is another example of this Rambo management style.

The company has invoked the 'inability to pay' clause – but the main shareholder is the government. How could it claim inability to pay when it has just turned in a €1.5 billion surplus?

And if it still a little short of cash, they could raise the revenue by asking our top business people to start paying tax.

That would mean closing down the 'tax exile' loophole which allows O Reilly, Smurfit and the rest of the wealthy elite to pay no tax because they claim to reside outside Ireland for 183 days a year.

It is absurd that a government, which has pushed wage restraint, refuses to pay the meagre partnership awards itself.

ENGINEERING A CRISIS

BEHIND THE scene at An Post, there has been a deliberate strategy to engineer a crisis so that the new management team led by Donal Curtin can rip up previous agreements.

The 'crisis' began when an apparent profit of €1million was turned into a loss of €43 million. No real explanation has been given – it is simply about manipulating book figures.

The losses do not take account of the fact that the Irish postal service loses €26 million on inbound mail it has to deliver.

And unlike other state owned firms, there is no subvention for the Public Service Obligations of An Post. Delivery in rural areas can cost up to four times those of urban areas – but is anyone seriously suggesting that people in those areas should be deprived of a service simply because there is no profit in it?

The aim of the manufactured crisis is to ram home changes that would be completely unacceptable to trade unionists.

THIS IS NOT CHANGE —IT'S SLAVERY

COLLECTION AND Delivery provides a good example of the type of slave labour conditions which management dream of.

- They want attendance between 6 am and 10.30 to be decided by management
- They want a free hand to design all routes – and then insist that all mail has to be delivered.
- They want to abolish breaks during overtime working

- A free hand to recruit casuals
- Rural deliveries to be given to contractors
- A free hand in re-deployment
- Reduction in annual leave.

The great irony in all this is that the management who demand these terrible changes live on high salaries – even though they claim the company is making a loss.



■ An Post workers face attacks

Privatisation is the aim

THE AIM of all these attacks is to break the morale of the post office workers and to impose such draconian conditions that they can be eventually sold off to private companies.

Privatisation is being driven throughout in the EU under the guise of various directives.

In January 2004 outgoing international mail was

liberalised. By 1st January 2006, global multi-nationals will be able to cherry pick the delivery of mail just over 50 grams.

The EU gives a handy cover to right wing politicians here. They hide behind the EU and claim 'there is nothing we can do'.

However, the people Europe never voted for these directives. An unelect-

ed Commission decided them behind closed doors.

The funny thing is that the Communications Minister claimed to be opposed to these 'neo-liberal economics'. Yet now he sits back and does not tell the Irish people why he wants to abolish weekend collection of mail or why he is still planning to introduce Roadside Collection boxes.

WE CAN RESIST:

WORKERS NO longer have to put up with this nonsense.

There is a huge mood of discontent in this country at the moment.

People are sick to their back teeth of the greed of a tiny handful of very rich people who want to take control of our public services.

The vast majority do not want to have to rely on global corporations like UPS or FedEx for their postal service.

The only reason why Bertie Ahern is talking—Comical Ali style—about being a 'socialist' is that he knows that the arguments about privatisation have touched a nerve with people.

And privatisation can be resisted.

On January 1st 2004, one quarter of Dublin Bus was supposed to be sold off—or at least that is what the then Transport Minister Seamus Brennan said.

Today, Dublin Bus is still in state hands—and Brennan has been packed off to Social Welfare where he tends his new 'caring image'.

The reason is that the bus workers organised against privatisation—and took strike action.

The same thing can happen in An Post. In the New Year the unions can reopen the battle to get wage increase that are due to them—and tackle the battle against privatisation.

They will have the support of thousands of workers—who want to see a return to strong unions.

Socialist Worker AFTER MARCH MEETING The Battle Against Privatisation

Speakers:

Joe Moore, CWU Executive, personal capacity.
Tom O Connor Busworkers Action Group
Kieran Allen, Editor of Socialist Worker
Earl of Kildare Hotel, Kildare St
(Meeting starts after march breaks up. Informal setting for drink and discussion)

RESISTANCE SCORES VICTORY ON BIN TAX

THE CIRCUIT Court has ruled in favour of a case appealed from the District Court on behalf of the Dublin City Campaign Against the Bin Tax.

In this landmark case, Justice Lindsay found that the City Council illegally applied bin charges for the years 2001/2002, on the basis that they defied their own criteria and failed to provide incentives for recycling.

The Circuit Court ruled in favour of a case appealed from the District Court on behalf of the Dublin City Campaign Against the Bin Tax. This is a victory for the thousands of non-payers throughout the city.

The judgement vindicates the stance taken by the campaign, that the bin charges are an unjust double tax. It will have major implications for the Council policy of pursuing non-payers of the charges through the Courts.

In this landmark case, Justice Lindsay found that the City Council illegally applied bin charges for the



years 2001/2002, on the basis that they defied their own criteria and failed to provide incentives for re-

cycling. Because the Council imposed a flat-charge, regardless of whether use was made of the service

or not, the charge was deemed illegal in this case.

The case was taken on appeal by two members of the campaign in Dublin.

The implications of this ruling are that nearly 300 cases pending for non-payment of the charges in this period will fall. It could also mean that those who did pay the charges could justifiably pursue a refund from the Council.

According to Councillor Joan Collins of the campaign, "This proves that people have been correct to refuse to pay this unjust double tax."

"On a daily basis people all over Dublin are being bullied and threatened by the Council because of these charges."

"Just this week thousands of threatening letters from a debt collection company Legal & Trade have gone out all over Dublin."

"In some cases the Council staff are phoning peoples homes and harassing them for the bin charges."

"We believe this ruling will help our case in standing up to the council's tactics which have been marked by threats and jailings in this high profile campaign."

"The Council are totally out of order".

BUT LABOUR LETS US DOWN

DISGRACEFULLY, Dublin City Councillors voted for a budget which includes a 74% increase in bin charges only last week.

The main reason was that the Labour Party ratted on the campaign in order to forge their alliance with Fine Gael.

The resentment and anger of Dublin citizens to this hike will be boosted by the court ruling.

Socialism means more democracy, not less

*Socialism is neither dead nor the property of the Taoiseach, writes **KIERAN ALLEN**. Real socialists would tackle land speculators around Dublin.*

Published in the *Irish Times*, 6th December

WHAT A strange world. Bertie Ahern has found "socialism" and with the zeal of a convert keeps mentioning it in media interviews. Yet former radicals like Patrick O'Dea (*Irish Times*, December 2nd) cannot stop recanting. He wants a decent "funeral, burial or cremation" because, as a good social worker, he needs a "letting-go ritual".

Bertie Ahern may be a political novice in dialectical theorising - but at least he recognises that socialism did not die in 1989. The regimes of eastern Europe were based on dictatorship, brutality and super-exploitation. Socialism means more democracy, not less.

Under capitalism we vote every four or five years on how "to run the country" - but democracy then stops at the office or factory door. If, flushed with enthusiasm for the democratic process, you dare to suggest that the workers in your job might take some decisions about what is produced and by what method, you will quickly be shown that same door.

Patrick O'Dea must have been acting out his own caricature when he stood outside McDonald's shouting "Down with bunburger ideology". More serious socialists joined picket lines there when workers were denied a right to join a union - just as they also stood outside the Russian embassy to support free independent trade unions such as Solidarnosc.

Instead of belonging to either camp during the Cold War, *Socialist Worker* ran a masthead: "Neither

Washington nor Moscow, but International Socialism." Mr O'Dea thinks we need to embrace the market. But which market? Of the 100 top economic units in the world economy today, 51 are firms.

Companies like General Motors are bigger than whole countries such as Ireland or South Africa. These corporations have the power to subvert democracy, to shape economies and, crucially, to do deals with each other to carve up the markets.

When water companies bid to take over a public service, few people realise that the same firms which act as rivals in one country, co-operate in another country to put in similar bids.

The concentration of wealth means that large firms often blackmail states to get big handouts of "corporate welfare". Remember how Irish taxpayers kept funding the AIB bank after it got into a little difficulty through speculating on the London insurance market.

Adam Smith's days of the "free" market are well and truly over. Real existing capitalism, as distinct from the idealised image found in economics textbooks, brings a fusion of political and economic elites.

Corporations, quite literally, buy political power to enforce a regime of low taxation on profits and hidden subsidies for themselves.

The result is a world of inequalities that have never been dreamt of before. Today three billionaires own more than the population of sub-Saharan Africa. In 1960, the ratio of income of the global wealthy to the poor was 30 to one. But by 1989, this

had risen to 59.

Within the advanced Western economies, the gap between rich and poor has also grown. According to *Business Week*, a CEO earned roughly 40 times the wage of the average employee in 1960 - today the gap has widened to 600 times.

In Ireland there has been a redistribution of wealth - to the wealthy. About 10 per cent of the national income has been redistributed to those who control profits, dividends and rent.

No wonder that our pint-drinking Taoiseach has started to get the message. The glaring inequalities have become just too hard to hide. Socialists may not get huge votes but the causes they champion - opposition to war, to bin charges, a return to strong unions - are popular. As a skilled political opportunist, Bertie senses that the "times they are a changing" - again.

But he will have to do a little more

to prove his socialist credentials. As a novice to left-wing causes, we can, perhaps, excuse his initial definition of socialism - namely that the rich and poor have an equal right to enjoy the state-owned Botanical Gardens.

If such a right exists, surely there is an even more powerful right to housing. Yet Mr Ahern's Government has cut back on social housing and left many at the mercy of the market forces that pushed prices beyond their reach. Real socialists would tackle the handful of speculators who control the land banks around Dublin. If ever there was a case for nationalisation, this is it.

Nor would real socialists tolerate a situation where medical treatment depends on the size of your wallet. Socialism surely means universal free healthcare - paid for through taxes on wealth.

Bertie may want to trumpet his more "caring image" by boasting that workers on the minimum wage will

no longer pay tax. But real socialists ask the more fundamental question: why are one-third of Irish workers receiving just the minimum wage? After all, workers created the Celtic Tiger by giving record levels of productivity. Isn't it time to end gross exploitation and take key sectors of the economy, such as the banks, into public ownership?

Finally, when the very planet itself is in danger, a real socialist Taoiseach would not allow Ireland to so recklessly disregard the Kyoto treaty by spewing carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Environmental problems cannot be tackled through competition and greed - our very survival as a species requires planning and co-operation. The left tide is coming back - and Bertie will have to keep running to stay ahead.

Kieran Allen is editor of *Socialist Worker*. This article was published in the *Irish Times* on December 6th.

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