

MARCH 19

**GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION AGAINST
THE OCCUPATION OF IRAQ**

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Parnell Square
BELFAST: 2.00 pm
Arts College**

Socialist Worker

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Eamonn McCann



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WHEN IT COMES TO CRIMINALITY... FIANNA FAIL ARE THE EXPERTS

THE GREATEST gangsters in this country are not associated with Sinn Fein – but rather with Fianna Fail. Consider a few facts.

Money laundering: The police say the republicans run a huge money laundering operation.

But a top Fianna Fail supporter, Des Traynor, set up a special bank, the Guinness Mahon Cayman Trust, to launder money that had been put into offshore accounts and bring it back into a 'legal' Dublin bank.

According to the writer Colm Keena 'how much was involved may never be known but it may be hundreds of millions.'

Remember: the Provos are accused of laundering a few million!

Scams: The former Fianna Fail Taoiseach Charles J Haughey had £1 million in debt written off by the AIB and got a bribe of £5,000 a month from top business people, including Ben Dunne.

Like a good mafia don, Haughey made sure his friends were looked after. Dunnes Stores were allowed to designate themselves as a trust – so they paid hardly any taxes!

FF junior minister Conor Lenihan accepted a donation from the chairman of a finance company part-owned by a director at the centre of the money-laundering enquiry.

Caught Red-Handed: A few republicans have been arrested – but one former Fianna Fail minister is already in jail for bribery and corruption.

Ray Burke took money from builders, stuffed An Bord Pleanala with supporters and made sure his friends were looked after.

But the biggest scandal, involving money coming from a company controlled by Tony



Ray Burke; Charlie Haughey and Conor Lenihan

O'Reilly, has not yet even been investigated!

Cover up for Violence: MI5 planted an operative, Brian Nelson, inside the UDA to carry out assassinations of known republicans. To this day, the British state has been involved in the cover up.

Justice Minister Michael McDowell cannot stop smiling like a Cheshire cat. The Provos have been 'caught red-handed' and it proves they are 'a colossal crime machine'.

Socialist Worker holds no brief for Sinn Fein - but the hypocrisy of the establishment is breath taking.

They targeted the republican movement over a long period, probably using the decade long peace process to plant informers within their ranks. But they only moved against 'money laundering' when it suited their pur-

poses. They moved when Burke was being put behind bars and when the theft of up to €2 billion from medical cardholders was revealed.

So far the evidence against the republicans is based on police intelligence and there are inconsistencies.

Within hours of the Cork City arrests, the police briefed the media that a prominent former Sinn Fein councillor was involved. The man was named and connected to Martin McGuinness. But the next day he was released.

There were reports that another had been arrested for membership of the IRA. Then it was disclosed that he was a 'dissident' with links to the Real IRA.

Most astounding, a large cache of the money was found at the New Forge Country Club – a centre for former PSNI officers!

The crisis in Republicanism

WE DO not know how republicans raise their funds.

They certainly control a number of business and in the past Socialist Worker has reported on building firms in West Belfast 'with known republican sympathies' who treat their staff very badly.

Their political strategy does not rest on the strength of

workers – but on conspiracy and on networks, which cut across the class divide.

Republicans covered up for the thuggish murder of Robert McCartney – and that is a total disgrace.

But the political elite are the real masters of cover up.

The wealthy and powerful can always 'legalise' their fund

raising operations because they write the laws and appoint the judges.

Opposition movements like the republicans sometimes adopt legal or illegal means.

The real question is what the money is for.

The tragedy is that the leaders of Sinn Fein want to follow where Fianna Fail once

trod.

They fight elections like a conventional machine and want to pension off the IRA.

Their aim is to get inside the establishment – but the past weeks have shown the high price Ahern and Blair will extract first.

>>>More on the crisis pages 2,8,10

REPUBLICANS IN CRISIS

Caught in a Trap

By KIERAN ALLEN

GERRY ADAMS has sat through countless hours of police interrogation – so he can stonewall, fudge and wriggle off many hooks. But even Gerry Adams cannot escape from the huge contradictions that are exploding at the heart of Irish republicanism.

Adams has been the most successful leader ever, overcoming the historic tendency of the movement to split. Like other IRA leaders before him – and Gerry Adams was in the IRA – he wants to make peace with the system and get into government. He wants Sinn Fein in cabinet, North and South, hoping to use those positions to integrate both parts of the island.

This vision is not a million miles away from Fianna Fail – his potential ally. That prospect does not offer much to his working class supporters.

How could a republican sitting on a police board make the PSNI more acceptable to thousands of working class youth who have kept the police isolated from Catholic ghettos for thirty years?

Or how does Martin McGuinness being a deputy Minister at Stormont alleviate poverty in the Bogside or halt the drift to sell off public services. (When last in government, McGuinness was an enthusiastic backer on Private Finance Initiative schemes – a form of privatisation).

Discontent within republicanism

Traditionally, discontent within republicanism has drifted towards militarism. The gun is seen as more radical than the suit and tie because it is more heroic and sincere.

Adams' solution to these tensions up to now has been to speak through both sides of his mouth. He has played a brilliant game of combining the gun and the ballot – just as he played the same game of embracing George Bush on St Paddy's Day and then joining anti-war protests back home.

But McDowell, Ahern, Blair and Paisley have ganged up to expose these contradictions and they have caught Adams in a trap.

The message is that he must break from the IRA. As Ahern put it, 'when you are included, there is a price. The price is respecting the security forces, North and

**McDowell, Ahern,
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Times change: Gerry Adams at an IRA funeral some years ago (left) and more recently with new friends George Bush and right wing politician Pete King (right)



South.'

Partnership man

As the spotlight fell on Phil Flynn over the Cork arrests, he responded defiantly that he was an 'unrepentant republican'.

The former Vice President of Sinn Fein symbolises what can happen to the movement when it responds to Ahern's 'punish-reach-out' strategy.

Flynn's republicanism became a form of patriotism that was hired out to big business.

He began as a 'left republican' who was witch hunted by the Southern establishment after he acted as mediator in the Herrema kidnapping in 1975. The Fine Gael minister Paddy Cooney refused to negotiate with the IMPACT union as long as he was general secretary. The membership, however, defiantly backed him.

He responded by constructing one of the most tightly controlled unions where the scope for rank and file initiative was minimal. Former left wingers were head hunted and turned into his clones.

Flynn moved ever closer to Fianna Fail and became one of the main union supporters of social partnership.

If British union leaders are said to take the 'Queen's shilling', Flynn quite literally embraced partnership with the enthusiasm of a banker.

He resigned from the union to become a sidekick of Bertie Ahern. Using his 'union credentials' he swung several bad deals for workers while chairing an 'independent commission'. Meanwhile he became a director of several large corporations that legally fleeced workers.

Why do republicans have business links?

North and South, republicans develop links with businessmen, receiving huge funds from companies like Coca Cola or Chuck Feeney's.

Although republicans have a radical edge, their politics are not based on social class. Quite the opposite.

They share a fervent belief that the mass of people are fundamentally passive and that it requires a committed minority to achieve gains. This heroic myth of 1916 is drummed into every republican. The mass of Dublin workers were 'corrupted' by empire and only 'woken up' by the brave action of the martyrs.

The radicalism of the movement comes from its conspiratorial nature. Manipulation, secrecy, closed door decision making are the stock and trade.

The IRA army council sees itself as the 'real government' of Ireland – shaping events from behind the scenes.

It is a tradition that goes back to



Ex SF Vice President Phil Flynn

the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) or even earlier to Blanqui, the French radical.

All of this means that republicans do not rely on open methods of political organisation that try to raise the wider confidence of workers.

Instead the conspiratorial methods make it easy to slide from one social class to another. After 1926, for example, whole units of the IRA shifted over to form branches of Fianna Fail. At first they sounded more radical than Labour – but a decade later, the same conspiratorial networks stretched into the business world.

The conspiratorial methods mean that the IRA has come to act as a power over their neighbourhoods. The furore over Robert McCartney's murder shows this.

A movement with little struggle

Robert McCartney's sister put her finger on a real problem when she talked about a New IRA and an Old IRA. Since the ceasefire, new people have joined the IRA – many of whom want power over their communities.

The movement is no longer forged in struggle – but in making its peace with the system. This is all the more so, since class issues are supposed to be left to be solved after the national question is settled.

Today republicans still talk radical – but actually implement neo-liberal policies.

Officially they oppose water charges in the North – but they reject non-payment and when chair of the relevant assembly committee SF spokesperson Francie Molloy accepted that they 'would have to be introduced.'

In Derry, they act as good capitalist managers on the council –

attacking workers for absenteeism and low productivity.

When there is no real struggle, paramilitary organisations become self serving. They have huge organisational resources – but little to fight for beyond periodic elections.

The result is a growing interest in petty forms of capitalism – taxi firms, building companies, bars which are still supposed to 'help the movement'.

The desire to seek power over communities means that IRA men also act like a local police force. Youth are expected to 'show respect'; to avoid 'anti-social behaviour' or be punished by beatings.

This is the type of degeneration that has so angered the McCartney family. They are right to express that anger – but their anger should not be manipulated by even bigger thugs like McDowell or Paisley.

We need a new left

The crisis of republicanism shows why we need a new left. Last May, Sinn Fein became the focus of huge working class discontent when they used their powerful financial resources to gain electoral support.

But the conspiratorial traditions of the party cannot take working class struggle forward. Their right to organise politically should be defended from McDowell – but a real left alternative is needed.

Such an alternative would look to workers for their ability to emancipate themselves.

Specifically, it would reject social partnership; oppose any coalitions with the right wing; spread resistance to war, bin taxes and water charges.

The left now has a responsibility to come together to provide that serious alternative.

Protests and trade union action can defeat bin tax

Brid Smith, PRO Dublin City Campaign against the Bin Tax, outlines the necessary steps that the campaign needs to take in order to beat the unjust tax

BIN CHARGES are once again high on the political agenda. An important demonstration to the Customs House Department of the Environment, on Saturday Feb 26th, has been enthusiastically welcomed by thousands of taxpayers around the City.

The protest has been endorsed by many groups such as the Dublin Council of Trade Unions, the Amalgamated Transport & General Workers Union, the Association of Combined Communities and Residents Association, Zero Waste Alliance Ireland and a whole range of TD's and Councillors.

In the Dail, the Labour Party has tabled a motion for a national waiver scheme for social welfare recipients. This is because they feel the pressure from voters on the issue of bin charges, despite their appalling record of voting for them. Many areas do not have any waiver scheme for the poor. In some cases this is because the service has been privatised.

The Ireland of inequality

Ireland is now one of the most unequal societies in the world. The Government's hidden taxes on goods and services such as bin charges are hitting working people very hard.

Combat Poverty agency figures show that lower income families pay 20% of wages on indirect taxation while the top earners pay just 9%.

According to Paul Sweeney, SIPTU economist, "high earners managed to avoid paying taxes – totally in many cases – by engaging in legal avoidance schemes such as owning race horses or property."

Martin Cullen, when he was environment minister, used our taxpayers money to enjoy himself on holidays around the world with overpaid PR consultant Monica Leech. And he called bin tax protestors spongers?

What needs to be done?

Firstly, the campaign against bin tax in Dublin has to be congratulated for keeping local areas organised over the last five years.

Working people have endured legal threats, jailings, disruption to their bin service and harassment by debt collection agencies. And still, thousands of people, who refused to be bullied, are not paying bin taxes.

Over the next few months we need to keep up local activists networks, to leaflet these areas and keep up the non-payment campaign. Where local authorities have removed the service, street meetings are being called and local people organised to throw rubbish bags in trucks and to organise mass clean ups.

After five years of threatening to remove our service, the Council are still on the back foot. All areas need to co-ordinate and respond to non-collection with mass protests and civil disobedience.

The trade unions

But crucially we need to bring this struggle to the heart of the trade union movement.

SIPTU's economists have shown how indirect taxes are fleecing workers and the poor. It's time now for these unions to act.

In Dublin City Council, bin workers are told that where there are protests, they are to phone a manager who will then call the police. They are being made to look like they are siding with management and the police against their own communities.

But the fact is that these workers are subject to the same injustice on taxation as the communities they work in. This is intolerable. They need union backing also because their jobs are being directly threatened by the bin charges.

Firstly the number of houses putting out rubbish is dropping. If this continues, jobs will be cut. Secondly, the council are allowing private companies, like IPODEC, to tout for custom from apartment blocks in the city and to undercut the council price.

Eventually these companies will be able to compete in housing estates against the council. In Bray, for example, this led to lost Council jobs and a much more expensive bin service for the community.



Very lively and angry protest in Dun Laoghaire against bin charges. Protestors dumped a few bags of plastics outside the council to highlight the lack of recycling

The campaign in Dublin has visited council workers on a weekly basis and received great support for these arguments. The union leaders need to unite with local communities and defend their members' jobs.

The future for the campaign

All over Ireland, like in Cork and Galway, campaigns are coming to life against the Government's waste management policy. The real agenda of the FF/PD club is to open up our public services to the market and introduce fur-

ther indirect taxes like water and sewage charges. The bin tax is just the tip of the iceberg but is a very important struggle against the privatisation of services and against poverty in our communities.

What is the solution to the waste management crisis? It is not rocket science. Companies who manufacture and package goods for sale must be made to bear the cost of their waste or invest in ways of reducing packaging.

Working people should be rewarded for recycling and not penalised by increased bin taxes. We don't need incinerators. Recycling infrastruc-

ture should be put in place where the state is able to gain from recycling materials such as paper, glass, metal, plastic, wood etc.

There is a lot of money to be made from rubbish and it should be entirely in public hands and properly planned. Instead, greedy private company directors can pay themselves as much as €1.5 million in one year.

These are the real spongers. Working class communities know they are being cheated and are building campaigns to fight. It's not good enough for the unions to carry out surveys. Let's put them under pressure to fight.

Workers fight for decent lay off package

BRID SMITH reports

REDUNDANT workers in a Dublin-based printing plant have organised themselves in an effort to triple the paltry redundancy package offered by management.

At the end of January, workers at Sercom, based in the Cloverhill Industrial Estate, West Dublin received the shocking announcement that 220 jobs were to go.

Sercom is a subsidiary of DCC, a multinational group which controls groups such as Roberts & Roberts and Brodericks among others, and netted \$1.8 billion in profits in 2004.

But workers in Sercom were told they would receive just three-and-a-half weeks pay per year of service in a redundancy package.

Two of those weeks are

covered by statutory redundancy payments, meaning 60 percent of which can be retrieved from the public purse.

Anger has erupted among the workers at Sercom at the miserly redundancy offer. As one union representative told Socialist Worker: "DCC were happy enough to take the profits from our labour and will continue to take profits long after we are gone. They must think we are mad. There is no way we are prepared to accept this." Workers at the factory who are members of AMICUS and SIPTU have organised a "redundancy committee" with two reps elected from each department, which put the redundant workers case to management.

The demand for eight weeks from the company plus the two weeks statutory redundancy was

not entertained by management, the matter was then referred to the Labour Relations Commission (LRC).

"Even the LRC were angry at the company's response. We were willing to come down to six weeks plus two but they wouldn't budge and the case is now due in the Labour Court on March 18th", the representative told Socialist Worker.

DCC is claiming that Sercom has nothing to do with it although it is a wholly owned subsidiary of this huge conglomerate - the same claim made by General Motors when it shut down Packard Electric in Tallaght in the 1990s.

But Sercom employees are fully aware of the profits made by DCC and of the fact that the day before they announced the closure of the plant, DCC bought up two companies worth between

22- and 24-million euro.

According to one of the shop stewards: "There is definitely more money there for us. But we have to fight for it. Management issued all the workers with figures for each of their redundancy packages but that just made us even more angry.

"Most of us have between 10- and 20-years service and we will not walk away from here without a fight. Not one single piece of equipment will leave this plant until they agree a deal with us.

"We formed this redundancy committee to tell our unions what we want not what they want us to accept," the rep said.

"We feel very strong about this. If we settle quickly they will get what they want but if we fight we stand to get what we believe is our just deserve because we helped to make them huge profits."

Water charges protests begin in Northern Ireland

THE TURNOUT in Belfast and Derry for the February 12th demonstrations against the water charges was disappointing but not surprising.

We know from the experience of the bin charges campaign in the South that large numbers of people do not become active until the bills start to drop through their letter-boxes.

In many parts of Dublin, anti-bin charges meetings attracted no more than a dozen people before the bills started to arrive. By the time the city council started to move against those refusing to pay, the same areas were having meetings that drew hundreds.

Crucially, small numbers of people in each local area had already been signing up thousands to the non-payment campaign. The same needs to happen across the North if water charges are to be defeated.

Part of the problem has certainly been the attitude of the trade union leadership. On the one hand they have encouraged a community campaign; on the other they refuse to back the community's strategy, which is to build a mass non-payment campaign as the only way to prevent privatisation.

Some trade unionists and all the politicians — including politicians from Sinn Féin — say we shouldn't start building the non-payment campaign yet because it will look like we're accepting that we can't prevent the introduction of the charges.

But the opposite is the case: if enough people support the non-payment campaign, the Government is far less likely to bring in the separate charges.

The reasoning is simple. Minister Spellar has made it clear that the main reason for water charges is to produce a "revenue stream" to make our water service attractive to private water corporations.

We know from experience right across the world — from Bolivia, Peru, Ghana, South Africa, Dublin and Waterford — that a mass non-payment campaign scares private water companies away and forces governments to back down on plans for water privatisation.

Over the coming months, anyone who wants to see a better Northern Ireland needs to organise a meeting against the water charges and start the work of signing up everyone in their area to the non-payment campaign.

DUBLIN BUS:

48 hour week to hit workers earnings

By OWEN MACORMACK

CONCERN has been expressed among Dublin Bus workers that new working time regulations will be used by management to substantially change working conditions for some drivers.

The bus workers are already facing a severe reduction in their earnings because of the upcoming introduction of new working arrangements, to comply with the EU regulations on the 48-hour week which will restrict the amount of overtime drivers can do.

However, workers are fearful that management will use the new laws to force in much wider changes that will impact on their livelihoods.

The company wants to create a whole new "shift pattern", meaning some drivers will work late duties exclusively.

Many drivers are now demanding a substantial increase in basic pay to compensate for the changes and offset any reduction in their livelihoods.

Rule change anger mem-

bers

Meanwhile the National Bus and Rail Workers Union is to hold a special delegate conference to ratify a number of rule changes to its constitution.

If passed, they would allow for the expulsion of members who also belonged to any other

body, union or association, and would effectively exclude ordinary members from contesting certain shop stewards positions.

Many drivers are angry as what they see as an attack on the union's open and democratic structures and are campaigning

to stop them. The news of the change was revealed through the rank and file bulletin The Busworker, after the NBRU leadership seemed content to hold the conference first before telling the membership about the rule changes.



Fight-back against pension cuts

SOME 200 workers marched through Belfast city centre in the first National Day of Action in the fight against the government's pension cuts.

The lively demonstration was a firm rejection of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's plans to increase the age at which civil servants can retire from 60- to 65-years old.

Any notion of early retirement on full pension is also being attacked, so too is the way the pension is calculated, meaning cuts of thousands of pounds for most workers.

These attacks come as MPs have increased their pension entitlements while

judges pensions can amount to as much as £100,000 per year.

No wonder then that the march and rally in Transport House was an angry affair with nurses, teachers, civil servants and a strong contingent of fire-fighters.

Jim Quinn from the fire-fighters union, the FBU said, "We're here to show solidarity because the government doesn't actually come for us for another year."

"The way we see it, we had a contract with the government. We take our pension rights seriously. The cuts will mean thousands of pounds in lost pensions and more years of work to get a full pension. The FBU will build solidarity for actions taken by other unions to fight these attacks."

The message was the same from the platform. John Corey, President of the Civil Service Union, NIPSA, highlighted the government's lies.

"What kind of government turns the fact that we are living longer into a bad thing," he asked.

"They say they can't afford to pay, yet the money we need for our pensions is a drop in the ocean compared to what they have spent in Iraq. We plan to fight this and will be balloting for strike action to link up with those in Britain," he said.

Brian, a civil servant on the protest who worked in the Child Support Agency told Socialist Worker: "I had planned to retire at 57. That would have allowed me a full pension and I thought I'll get an early retirement to have more time with the kids and by that time maybe grandchildren."

"When I took on the job I thought about my future, Brian said. "I'll be supporting and building for the strike."

"The government wants to wreck my future. They won't do it without a fight."

Winds of change blowing for NIPSA

THE POSSIBILITY of a real struggle against water charges and pension "reforms" has taken a step forward following the announcement of the results of the NIPSA General Council elections.

The Council, which has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the union and the implementation of conference policies, has been controlled by more conservative elements in the union for the past two years.

Now, 12 of the 25 members of the General Council are aligned with the broad left Time for Change grouping. Another two were elected from the Uncivil Servant rank-and-file list, with a single vote denying another Uncivil Servant activist a seat.

These developments are extremely important in such a crucial year for workers in the public sector. The results for the Uncivil Servant candidates

are impressive considering the short time that they have been building the group.

The platform on which they stood is based on a rank-and-file strategy of taking a real fight to New Labour on issues such as civil service job cuts, pension cuts, low wages and water charges.

In November Uncivil Servant activists organised unofficial action in support of striking GB civil servants.

Time for Change (TfC) now have an opportunity to turn their words into action and many activists will be watching them closely.

Only a couple of years ago TfC squandered an opportunity to use their majority on the General Council to launch a real fight back across the public sector.

Unfortunately, they seemed more interested in the activities of the right wing of the union than in reorganising union

branches and building the union's strength.

When the new General Council meets for the first time in June a number of crucial decisions will need to be made. More strike action will probably be needed to stop attacks on our pensions.

The union should unconditionally support non-payment

of water charges and NIPSA should be organising to get union members to Scotland in July, where the real decisions on our futures will be made at the G8 Summit.

The new opportunities presented by the election results must be turned into a renewed fight back involving all NIPSA members.

CE Scheme workers fight bullying

SEVEN WORKERS were sacked from the Loughlinstown News CE scheme after they complained about bullying from their boss.

They made the complaint on the 21st of January to the FAS area supervisor.

Three weeks later they were given their notice without explanation.

A representative of the

workers told Socialist Worker "This is a clear case of bullying and intimidation."

"We have had problems with our boss all along and as soon as we made a complaint we were given the bullet"

The workers organized a picket at the FAS training center and are launching a petition among their neighbours and workmates.

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The growth of private medicine in Ireland



Hospital services conditions for workers under attack

By DR PEADAR O'GRADY

A NEW wave of private medicine is sweeping the country. McCreavy prepared the ground with the introduction of tax breaks for private hospitals in the 2002 Finance Act.

With Harney as Minister for Health, a new impetus has been given to the growth of private medicine: private health insurance, private clinics, private hospitals and nursing homes.

Harney is reducing funding to public health services and encouraging private investors to step in instead. She is offering public contracts through the National Treatment Purchase Fund to get them started.

"Private or nothing" is her plan for the health service. It is part of a deliberate policy of privatisation of health and other public services driven by corporate globalisation (neoliberalism).

Harney portrays this as a way of bringing money into the health service to make it more effective and efficient. In reality, money will flow out of the service through short-term profit maximisation, bureaucracy and advertising. Profit-driven provision will lead to badly planned services, leading to further chaos in the system.

Private medicine is not new to Ireland. Local pharmacies have traditionally been privately owned and GPs have always charged fees, which has led to a situation where GP services are more concentrated in wealthier areas.

It has also meant that consultants see their wealthier patients more quickly. As poorer patients tend to be seriously ill more often, private medicine is a major cause of inefficiency in the health service.

Government policy is now widening and deepening private sector involvement in healthcare by cutting back on public medicine. 200,000 medical cards have been cut since the FF/PPD government was elected in 1997.

This means more people have to pay privately to see their GP. New medical cards proposed by Harney cut the entitlement to free prescription drugs.

In the public hospitals the shortage of 5,000 beds has forced workers to take out private health insurance to ensure they are seen quickly by spe-

cialists (consultants).

Private medicine is also being deepened by the increasing involvement of private companies and huge multinational corporations in the provision of insurance and/or care. Some examples illustrate these trends.

Touchstone has targeted GP care. It is seeking to open a chain of GP clinics with shop space for pharmacies and other therapists to rent private offices. The first such clinic is to be built on the Riverside development site in Mulhuddart.

GPs are being forced to look to private investors because money for the Government's Primary Care Strategy announced in 2001 is not being released.

The growing numbers being forced into private care has created a business opportunity for AIB and billionaire Dermot Desmond, who have set up the first "for-profit" insurance company, Vivas Health. The chief executive of the new Health Service Executive (HSE), Kevin Kelly, is a former managing director of AIB!

The Government has abolished "community rating," paving the way for profit for investors. Previously, insurers like VHI or BUPA had to offer insurance at the same rate to all regardless of health or age and were not allowed to generate profits.

These financial middlemen waste huge amounts of money on unnecessary bureaucracy and advertising. In 2004, BUPA and VHI spent €2 million on advertising alone because of competition from Vivas.

Tax breaks have led to a rash of new plans for private hospitals. In 2004, consultant Jimmy Sheehan and millionaire beef-baron Larry Goodman opened the "for-profit" Galway Clinic.

This 100-bed private hospital is the first private hospital to be built since the Mater Private and Blackrock Clinic were opened in the mid-1980s. The Galway Clinic was given €20 million in tax-payers' money while the Government tried to close the 100-bed public hospital in Monaghan saying it was "not viable."

They claimed that the Hanly Report showed hospitals with less than 300 beds were "inefficient" and should be closed. Evidently, this does not apply to new "for-profit" private hospitals.

New "for-profit" hospitals are now being planned all over the coun-

try. Sheehan and property company Ballymore are building a new 125-bed private hospital in Lucan called the Hermitage Clinic.

Eurocare International, an Irish consortium of doctors and businessmen, are planning 40-bed private clinics in Waterford and Carlow. ReNaasance Medica are opening a 40-bed private clinic in Johnstown, Co Kildare.

Quality Healthcare are to build Shanakiel private hospital in Cork. Private investor Tom Kane is to open Adare Manor as a private hospital in Limerick. The list is growing by the day.

The new Beacon Hospital in Sandymount will be run by Triad Hospitals, a US Fortune 500 multinational corporation that runs 250 hospitals in the US with an annual turnover of €2.4 billion.

Healthcare corporations in the US have been rocked by fraud. One, called HCA, was fined \$1.5 billion in 2001 for fraud. Another, Quorum, was fined \$95.5 million in 2001 for defrauding the public health service, Medicare, by "billing for unnecessary medical services and billing for services never provided."

Quorum is now owned by Triad Hospitals. Beacon Hospital will be Triads' first venture on this side of the Atlantic.

Private medicine can be compared to shop keeping. At first you have corner shops, then supermarkets, then supermarket chains like Superquinn, and ultimately multinational retail chains like Wal-Mart or Spar.

Irish private medicine is rapidly progressing from corner shops and supermarkets to supermarket chains and multinationals. This means that the organisation of healthcare for profit is stepping up a gear and Government policy is to support it with tax-payers' money.

Evidence shows that "for-profit" health providers deliver a lower standard of care, more expensively, than public providers. If we are to avoid healthcare being bought and sold as a commodity, then an organised fight-back is urgently needed.

Local opposition by community groups like the Monaghan Hospital campaign and the resistance by unions like the INO and SIPTU need to step up a gear too. Our lives might just depend on it!

COMMENT

LONE PARENTS: Increase benefits and provide free child care

By MARY SMITH

KEVIN MYERS is reckoned by some as a "good writer" if a tad provocative – "was even a bit of a radical in his day" – so the story goes. Actually the man is as much a credit to journalism as Dr Shipman was to medicine, and just as prepared to dispense poison.

Thankfully, a sizeable number of people reared up and put him back in his box after a particularly ugly and vicious rant in his Irish Times column. As a result he's "very, very sorry" for insulting lone parents and calling their children bastards.

Irish Times editor, Geraldine Kennedy, is a founding member of the PDs. She says she's sorry too! Sure you are Geraldine! Let's not forget that, before the PDs attacked refugees, Harney was calling "unmarried mothers" spongers – not the brown envelope brigade nor bent politicians but women and children in the poorest circumstances.

And now that Myers and Kennedy have "opened the debate" as the Indo described it, FF welfare minister, Seamus Brennan, wants to cut lone parent benefits.

Lone parents, most usually women, are not only among the poorest people in Ireland, but in Europe.

A new report from the European Commission shows that nearly a quarter of Irish women, including pensioners and widows, are "at risk of poverty" – they don't have enough money coming in.

Anthony McCashin,

Lone parents, most usually women, are not only among the poorest people in Ireland, but in Europe.



Kevin Myers

an academic in Trinity College Dublin, points out that of these women: "female lone-parent families have the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate, 49.3%" – that is nearly half.

At €168.80 a week for an adult and child to live on, it's no wonder.

Right-wingers like Myers whine about rent allowance and medical cards – like a home and health care are luxuries! They want authorities to spy on them to see if they are in new relationships.

The children's allowance barely touches the costs of rearing a child. This isn't a life young women choose because it's a cushy alternative to a crap job and living with your ma.

As McCashin's research shows: "Young unmarried mothers after becoming pregnant came to social welfare as a route to survival, but this was never a plan."

And far from being "benefits-addicted", as Kevin Myers claims, the majority of lone parents have taken up work since the laws changed to allow them limited earnings. As with CE scheme workers, if childcare was available, it's likely even more would choose to work.

And before there was a lone parents allowance? Well there were always young pregnant women, with the alternatives of "taking the boat" to England, of heartbreaking adoptions, of Magdalene laundries –

so much hidden misery it's not properly recorded.

How can we prevent the repeating history of poor young parents having babies who will become poor young parents in turn?

Research shows the most effective approaches are those which tackle poverty and offer the young a stake in the future – opportunities for learning, acquiring new skills and jobs that are interesting or fulfilling with decent wages.

Young people given real choices and opportunities are less likely to end up as lone parents. There is no mystery about avoiding pregnancy – decent sex education and access to contraception, and abortion for those who choose it.

It would be nice to see the Times get up on their high horse about the fact that our contraceptive services are among the most expensive in Europe, and despite the majority of Irish people favouring the provision of abortion, it's still not available here.

But what about today's lone parents? Well Socialist Worker has some suggestions (that Kevin Myers might choke on, with a bit of luck!).

One: Increase lone parent benefits to alleviate the hardship of low-income poverty.

Two: Provide free child-care so lone parents can take up education and work.

Three: Provide a programme of education and training for lone parents, leading to decent, well-paid jobs.

Revenue officers reckon there is in excess of €1 billion in taxes unpaid by the rich investing in things like property and racehorses.

The Criminal Assets Bureau should be used to go after them and use the money to fight poverty.

In the meantime we should congratulate and thank lone parents for doing the most important and the hardest job there is – helping to rear the next generation.

RESISTING IMPERIALISM:

Ahmed Ben Bella and the Algerian Revolution



By DAVE LORDAN

EIGHTY-SEVEN year old Ahmed Ben Bella is a living embodiment of anti-imperialist struggle. He was a leader of the 1954-62 war of liberation that defeated the French occupation of Algeria, at the cost of one million lives out of a population of nine million.

In 1963 he became independent Algeria's first president, instituting a series of much needed social reforms. He is speaking at the anti-war forum in Dublin over the weekend of 3rd -5th of March.

Today he is a leading figure in the worldwide anti-war movement. He is president of the Cairo Conference, a major international anti-war coalition formed in Egypt in 2003.

He spoke before thousands of anti-capitalists at the recent London Social Forum.

In a recent interview Ben Bella explained why he continues to resist: "Everything has changed and nothing has changed."

Fifty million people die of starvation annually. One quarter of the world's population suffers from curable tropical diseases. Three quarters of the world's population owe \$4,000 billion in debt and cannot possibly pay interest let alone pay the debt back. We must continue to fight".

France invaded Algeria in 1830, seeking to dominate lucrative Mediterranean trade routes. However it took many years of ruthless military campaigning before the enormous country was finally brought under control.

Tens of thousands of settlers were shipped in from across the Mediterranean and given the best land.

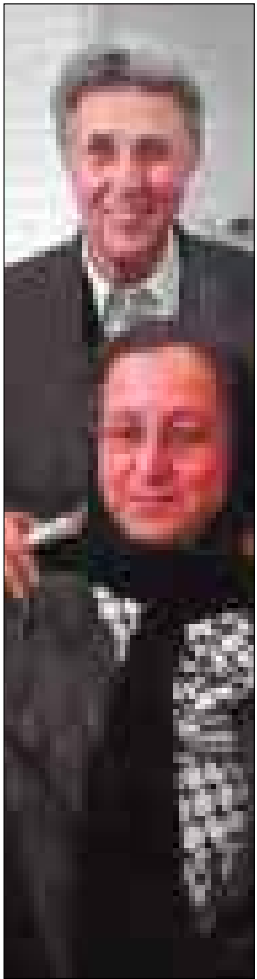
Most Algerians did not have a vote and the settlers, although only 10% of the population, had complete control of all Algerian political institutions.

Algeria's indigenous population was decimated in the early years of French settler colonial rule, falling from over four million in 1830 to less than 2.5 million by 1890.

Suppression

As in Ireland under the Penal laws, there was a systematic suppression of Algerian cultural identity.

Indigenous Algerians were French subjects, but could only become French citizens if they renounced Islam and Arab culture. Official posts could only



The fight for independence as depicted in The Battle of Algiers and Ben Bella at a recent anti-war debate

be held by French speakers and the primary school system set up the French did not teach Arabic.

Algerians were not permitted to hold political meetings or bear arms. They were subjected to strict pass laws that required them to seek permission from the colonial authorities to leave their hometowns or villages.

As a result of this oppression there were many large-scale uprisings and support for Algerian Independence was widespread.

On VE day in 1945, as millions across Europe celebrated their liberation from the Nazi's, 8000 Algerians marched in the city of Setif to demand their own liberation from French rule.

A number of French police and colonists were killed when they tried to interfere with the demonstration. In the ensuing reprisal thousands of Algerians were murdered.

The Setif massacres brought many Algerians to the conclusion that only armed resistance could force the French to withdraw. From then on the national liberation movement began to grow.

Ben Bella, who had been decorated for bravery while fighting for the Free French Army against the Nazis, was one of the many returning soldiers who joined the resistance. In 1954 he was one of the nine leaders who came together to form the ALN, and its military wing, the FLN (National Liberation Front).

Later that year they launched a co-ordinated national uprising. Ben Bella was sent to Cairo where his role was to win diplomatic support and procure arms from regimes sympathetic to the revolution such as Nasser's Egypt and Tito's Yugoslavia.

Colonial brutality

The French took brutal counter-measures to try and defeat the FLN. Troop numbers were increased to 1/2 million. Paramilitary gangs of settlers were allowed to launch numerous murderous reprisals, referred to as rat-hunts, against Algerian civilians.

Large swathes of Algeria were cleared out by the army and up to 2 million inhabitants were put into concentration camps where disease and hunger were rampant. The army's policy of collective responsibility meant that villages with thousands of inhabitants were carpet bombed in reprisal for attacks on the French army.

Free fire zones were established in which soldiers were ordered to shoot at anything that moved. Thousands of Algerians were tortured using methods such as water immersion and electric shock.

Despite this the resistance spread and grew stronger. The FLN began to win the support of more and more Algerians, including the Algerian Trade Union Congress (UGTA), many Jewish left-wingers, and even a small number of settlers.

The Algerian war nearly led to civil war inside France itself. The French parliamentary system fell apart and six governments fell as a result of the continuous crisis. Voices on the far right began to clamour for a return to military rule in Paris and General De Gaulle was to take power in 1959.

Disgracefully, the French Communist Party, which had the support of more than 20% of the French population, supported the occupation of Algeria.

Battle of Algiers

The turning point came with the Battle of Algiers in 1958. Algerian independence was being debated in the United Nations and the FLN decided to demonstrate to the world that they had majority support.

They called a general strike that completely shut down the city. In response, the Algerian colonial administration handed power over to French paratroopers under General Massu.

The paratroopers invaded the Casbah, the maze like network of narrow streets that housed Algerian workers, making mass arrests and forcing workers to return to work at gunpoint. After three days of army terror the paratroopers managed to break the strike.

But by winning the Battle of Algiers with such brutal methods, the French had lost the Algerian war politically. The whole world saw TV and photographic images of French soldiers terrorizing Algerian civilians. The French government could no longer claim that the rebellion was the work of a small minority of 'terrorists' as it was clear that the FLN had the support of a majority of the population. Crucially, an anti-war movement began to grow in France around socialist dissidents like Jean Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir.

Independence

One by one, as the rebels continued

their struggle, governments across the world began to recognise the FLN as the legitimate power in Algeria.

In April 1962 the people of France voted overwhelmingly for a settlement that promised Algerian independence and on July 1st Algerians voted almost unanimously for independence.

The Algerian revolution was not a socialist revolution, though its leaders sometimes used the language of socialism and did genuinely want to improve the lot of their people.

Ben Bella was elected president by a constituent assembly in July 1963 and his government took many progressive measures.

He distributed the huge European land estates among the rural poor and nationalised parts of the economy.

There were some advances in women's rights. He also gave material and diplomatic support to the Cuban revolution and other anti-colonial movements.

He allowed Algeria to be used as a staging post for Che Guevara's attempts to kick-start peasant rebellions in Angola and the Congo. Ben Bella became a figurehead for anti-imperialist movements in other countries.

As such he was considered a major nuisance by western governments. With the connivance of the French he was overthrown by a military coup in 1965.

Retreat

The new regime retreated from the reforms and internationalism of the Ben Bella period and he was kept imprisoned for the next fifteen years before being released into exile in 1980.

Today Ben Bella remains a nuisance to the powerful and an inspiration to the powerless.

Like socialists, he sees great hope for the future of humanity in a common world-wide struggle against imperialism and believes that "...the tide is turning. Witness the anti-globalisation movement worldwide, the demonstrators who ruined the World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle and disrupted the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund meeting in Prague and elsewhere. Something's afoot. These are changing times."

Read about the Cairo Conference at <http://stopwar.org.uk>

START TO MAKE POVERTY HISTORY IN 2005:

CANCEL THE DEBT

By Rory Hearne

On the 23rd of February, Make Poverty History Ireland are launching their campaign to "mobilise citizens and policy makers in Ireland to bring about the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The campaign is calling for urgent policy reform in the linked issues of trade, aid and debt. Make Poverty History is mobilising around key opportunities in 2005 to drive forward the struggle against poverty and injustice". These include the G8 summit in Scotland in July and the WTO meeting in Hong Kong in December.

The campaign includes development coalitions, relief and development agencies, faith based groups, trade unions and campaigning groups. It is part of the Global Call To Action Against Poverty which held a rally, introduced by Nelson Mandela and Bob Geldof, of tens of thousands at Trafalgar Square last week, and was initially launched at the Lula meeting at the World Social Forum in January.

Their manifesto opens with "The gap between the world's rich and poor is wider than ever. Global injustices such as poverty, AIDS, malnutrition, conflict and illiteracy remain rife. Despite the promises of our world leaders, at our present sluggish rate of progress the world will fail to reach the so-called Millennium Development Goals-internationally agreed targets to halve global poverty by 2015".

One of the main causes of poverty is the debt crisis that is enforced on the majority world by western countries, banks and the IMF and World Bank.

Did Blair and Brown cancel the debts? Not at all

Despite all the hype, countries affected by the tsunami only got the interest on their debt payments deferred, and that only lasts until the end of this year.

In December 2000 the UK government cancelled debts owed directly to the UK (bilateral debt) by the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). However, as multilateral debt (owed to creditors like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank) is 'preferred' or priority debt most bilateral debt is not being paid currently, so cancelling it has no real effect.

Only 10% of debts of the most poorest countries has been written off.

At the G7 meeting in London in February Gordon Brown, UK Chancellor, said "some 37 countries could benefit after a case-by-case review by bodies including the World Bank and IMF".

"The G7 have agreed to provide as much as 100% multilateral debt relief".

Proposals put forward by UK and Canada would not cancel debt stock, but only relieve debt service payments until 2015.

R&B star Jamelia wearing the Make Poverty History white band

Case example: Zambia

Zambia used 7.35% of its GDP (\$377 million) in repaying its debt in 2004. It spends twice as much on debt as it does on education. At the behest of the IMF it has privatised public utilities, removed subsidies, deregulated its markets and opened its doors to foreign imports. Despite this it only had 5% of its debt reduced under the HIPC initiative. It was once one of Sub-Saharan's wealthiest countries. But it is now placed lower on the Human Development index than in 1975. Life expectancy is now just 33 years. The Zambian ministry of health said that it expects half the population to die of AIDS.

Debt relief was on condition of "government reforms and the need for transparency".

Last year the Republic of Ireland reneged on its promise to provide 0.7% of national income in aid by 2007.

Cancel all the debt with no conditions

Neil Watkins, Jubilee USA network, responded "we insist this plan must be actual debt cancellation — not just debt service relief—that it apply to all impoverished countries, and that it must come without devastating economic conditions... The IMF can sell gold and raise more than \$35bn and the World Bank can raise at least \$17bn to fund debt cancellation". (www.jubileeusa.org)

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) was started in 1996. Since then only 15 countries have receive relief under the plan. For HIPC countries, external debt has gone up 320% since 1980 to \$189bn.

IMF and WB conditions (also in the HIPC plans) include cuts in health and education spending, enforced privatisation of state-run industries, removal of food and fuel subsidies to the poor, lowering tariffs on raw material production. It is crippling privatisation and liberalisation that hits the hardest.

Blair, Brown and Lula are not the saviours of the poor

Fantastic campaigns by groups like Jubilee 2000, who brought tens of thousands to protest at the G8 summit in Birmingham in 1998, the protests at the G8 summits in Genoa and Evian and

global anti-war protests, have successfully forced debt and poverty on to the agenda.

There has been some minimal action on debt, but most is just hot air. The UN estimates that over seven million children die each year from curable diseases and from unclean water that could be made safe.

Furthermore, the UNDP Human Development Report 2003 stated "Our best estimate is that halving of poverty will not be achievable in Sub Saharan Africa for at least another hundred years".

We should, therefore support the Make Poverty History campaign and mobilise to get as many people as possible to protest at the G8 summit.

But we should not allow the Third-way leaders like Blair or Lula use the concern over global poverty and Africa as a way of re-inventing themselves as caring leaders.

They are the very ones implementing neo-liberal policies. They do, however, also feel the pressure from millions of people in our movement. Through large mobilisations we can make them sweat even more.

Debt cripples the Third World

Poor countries pay \$100m in debt repayments every day. The poorest countries have handed \$3,450 bn to the wealthiest nations since 1982.

Indonesia 'owes' \$132bn. Most of it accumulated by the Suharto dictatorship. It repays \$13.7bn per annum in debt.

Nigeria borrowed \$5bn, has paid back \$16bn and still owes \$16bn on the same debt.

India 'owes' \$132bn and pays \$13bn per year.

Thailand 'owes' \$59bn and pays \$17.9bn per year.

Ending poverty for good

If we are to really end poverty there needs to be a 100% cancellation of all debt for all the majority world countries and the institutions forcing through neo-liberalism like the IMF, WB and WTO should be disbanded.

While half the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day, the wealth of 200 of the world's richest people exceeds the gross domestic product of the world's 170 poorest countries. Clearly the most

urgent demand is that resources are transferred on a massive scale from the rich to the poor.

Neither Brown, Blair nor Lula are going to (or even want to) achieve this.

It is up to us and the action of mass movements like the striking French public sector workers, the miners of Bolivia, the people of Venezuela, the landless peasants in Brazil, the millions who marched against the war and the 100,000s who will be protesting at the G8 summit to bring about such change.

All of us should work to ensure the G8 mobilisations are as large as possible and that they strengthen the grassroots movement and help mobilise further, rather than just ending up in the nice, but never fulfilled promises that will be uttered at the press conference by the G8 leaders.

■ The Make Poverty History campaign is launching on the 23rd February at 1pm at the Spire, O'Connell Street. It is an alliance open to national, regional or local organisations based in Ireland.

(www.makepovertyhistory.ie)

■ See also www.g8alternatives.org.uk for details of other protests at the G8 Summit



DEBATE

Does the movement need political parties?

Laurence Cox has been active in social movements since the 1980s.

What kind of parties?

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS throw up different types of party at different times. So we have “party” as a current of ideas or loose network, for example the Jacobins; “party” as a large-scale mass party, for example the SPD up to 1933; “party” as a small, tightly organised group, for example the Bolsheviks; and “party” as a brand or logo, for example New Labour.

Much of 20th century politics were dominated by top-down or state-centred parties: social democrats and Stalinists, Christian Democrats and fascists.

These approaches are increasingly unpopular, with lower levels of participation, a narrowing of the political differences within the elite, and a general loss of faith in elite politics and state solutions.

Since 1968 there has been a rise of movement politics, represented by Greens, Trotskyists, anarchists etc. Such groups appeal to those who want power from below; they represent the party form of the belief that “democracy is in the streets.”

What does the movement need from political parties?

The task of political parties should be to help movements develop, build power from below and make that “other world” real.

Thus they should bring activists together, network between different groups and issues and develop relationships of trust and solidarity — supporting movements’ own organising and development.

Parties that do this will win the respect of other activists, recruit experienced activists along with newcomers, and find the wider movement listening to them.

But it is up to parties to earn this



Anti capitalist activists facing political questions

response.

This role may, after all, be filled by other kinds of organisation such as movement networks.

Parties fail to fill this role when they put organisational interests above movement interests; when they turn people off politics; when they try to take over social movements or substitute themselves for

the movements; and when they see other activists as the enemy.

These are problems of any political organisation and something is down to the behaviour of individuals.

But parties have a role in shaping their own internal cultures and developing appropriate ways of acting externally if they are serious about

taking a leading role within movements.

Parties in the “movement of movements”

The anti-capitalist movement is one of great diversity and so also of struggles to make connections. We’re still finding out what will

work; there is, after all, no single handbook telling us how to defeat capitalist globalisation.

Within Ireland we have a particular history of sectarianism: it is hard to work together even on minimal goals.

Partly this is the result of years of isolation: to keep going in the ‘80s and ‘90s required sheer bloody-mindedness, leading to a strong organisational focus and powerful in-group tendencies.

But now, with the revival and development of social movements, the challenge is to drop defensive reactions and “organisational patriotism” in order to find ways of opening up to new movements from below and to place the movement first and the party second.

This is a problem for all organising traditions.

We tend to think that we know more than we do about the “movement ecology” out there. But inevitably we find it easier to spot some kinds of “wildlife” than others.

And it can be scary to see ourselves as part of the food chain — movement upsurges radically remake activist organisations.

Thus the parties we need are not made up of David Attenborough-type experts, commenting from a great height on the peculiarities of this or that species; they are David Bellamy types, standing up to their knees in the bog, clutching two handfuls of dripping moss with no pretence of superiority or separateness.

Above all, the parties we need are those which recognise that they are not the only activists taking initiatives, debating ideas and strategy, learning from experience, connecting with communities or developing networks.

In the middle of a movement upsurge such as the current one, arrogance simply gets in the way. Real contributions start with communication and cooperation.

As Marx and Engels wrote: “The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties... They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.”

The anti-capitalist movement has reached a turning point

Kieran Allen is a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party

AT THE recent World Social Forum, a right wing emerged to protect figureheads like the Brazilian President Lula from criticism — even though he implements neo-liberal policies.

It wishes to return to ‘politics as normal’ — lobbying the powerful to be compassionate about Africa and the Tobin tax while avoiding a focus on the war in Iraq and support for the resistance because they hinder alliances with the powerful.

Officially, the anti-capitalist movement does not allow parties to participate because they are ‘hierarchical’.

Yet Lula’s party — like Labour Parties everywhere — wants to obey the dictates of the IMF and the

World Bank.

Banning parties does not make this problem go away — it just hinders criticism of reformism.

Whenever full political debate between parties is suppressed, it is the dominant forces of our society who win out.

Every movement starts out as a festival of unity.

But the problems of confronting economic power and violence of capitalism lead to division.

Some only aspire to capitalism with a human face — other wants to overthrow the system.

Revolutionary parties arise because of the real contradictions in the consciousness of workers.

The working class is the only class in history capable of liberating itself — but it is also profoundly uneven.

Some workers are deeply influenced by the ideology of sexist and racist ideas and other reject them

A revolutionary minority needs to organise to overcome this unevenness

They challenge the dominant ideology and promote unity around the general interests of the class as whole.

They act as school of tactics and strategy where activists come together and broaden experience of how to increase militancy and confidence.

Such parties do not claim represent or speak for workers — they organise a minority who seek to convince wider forces.

They are not instruments for wielding power in a future socialist society. The idea of ‘one party’ socialist state is a Stalinist invention that should be entirely discarded.

Nor do they ‘prefigure’ that society by offering shining examples of socialist ethics. They are made up of the activists today — warts and all — who embark on the task of winning the majority to revolution.

If workers were ‘brainwashed’ there would be no need for such organisations — because there would be no prospect of liberation.

If revolutions occurred because people suddenly saw through the lies of the system, there would equally be no need for parties. We would simply await the great day. Yet neither is the case.

Are revolutionary parties hierarchical?

The SWP has a deeper level of democratic debate and decision making than any other organisation.

Its conference is preceded by three months of internal discussion where discussion bulletins are distributed to every member and any member can write for it.

These discussions lead to comprehensive ‘perspectives’ which an elected leadership is charged with implementing.

A revolutionary party has to be democratic because it relies on the energies of hundreds of activists.

How could they have the confidence to argue if they had not the space to honestly raise their experiences within the party?

But a party also has to act as a fist — rather than as separate fingers. It is not a debating society — but a fighting organisation that continually presses for action. Hence centralisation flows from democratic debate.

The health of a revolutionary party depends on how much it relates to wider movements of the struggle. It cannot just ‘teach’ those movements — but also learns and generalises their best experiences.

The social theorist Robert Michels claimed that there is ‘an iron law of oligarchy’ — by which he meant that it is inevitable that a small number of people will rule any organisation. It is a prejudice held by some activists.

But if socialism — which means collective control of society — is really possible then why isn’t it possible for activists to control the organisations we need to get there?

The real theft

THE ARREST of suspected money launderers and other so-called 'subversives' pushed the real story of the biggest theft in the history of the southern state off the news headlines. This was very convenient for Minister of Health, Mary Harney.

The Health Act 1970 (clarified by a Supreme Court decision in 1976) decreed that health boards should provide in-patient services, free of charge to persons suffering from physical or mental disability.

In 1976 the Department of Health sent a circular to health boards stating that charges should not apply to medical card holders. But health boards continued to charge medical holders for in-patient services.

Therefore, since 1976 the state has been engaged in mass theft: illegally charging elderly medical card holders for long-term residential care.

Just before Christmas Mary Harney rushed through a Bill in the Dail which attempted to retrospectively make lawful that theft and allow future charges (up to 80 percent of the old-age pension) be imposed for in-patients services, including charges on medical card holders. She was temporarily halted last week by the Supreme Court which ruled the Bill unlawful.

In 1978 a Chief Justice advised health boards of potential legal problems with the practice. Similarly, the ombudsman warned that the practice was wrong in 2001.

Former Health Minister Michael Martin knew about it 2003. Over eleven Ministers of Health (including ministers from the 'opposition' parties of Labour and Fine Gael) stood over this theft of over one billion euro from the most vulnerable in our society.

The establishment, supported by the Labour Party and the Greens is whipping itself into a frenzy to expose the 'criminality' of the Republicans and Sinn Fein. But where is the Labour Party's and the Greens' frenzy of criticism for the biggest criminals of all: Harney and her predecessors in the Department of Health?

There is no real criticism because Labour agrees with the principle of charging the most vulnerable in our society for health care. They explicitly agree with the future confiscation of old people's welfare entitlements to pay for institutional care.

Their electoral pact with Fine Gael (being enacted in the upcoming by-elections ahead of a 'democratic' decision on its electoral strategy at a national conference in May) ensures that criticism of corruption and previous governments will be kept to a minimum so as not to taint their future coalition partner's prospects.

Where is the frenzy against the €1.37 billion in pre-tax profits made by AIB in 2004? Or the frenzy against Ahern and other corrupt Fianna Failers? Is it because they also want to keep the door open to coalition with FF? Scandalously, Jack O Connor, president of SIPTU, said recently to Labour Party members in Lusk, north Dublin, that Labour should "very seriously" consider a coalition deal with Fianna Fail under Bertie Ahern's leadership.

All this shows that an alternative left opposition is urgently needed. There are an increasing number of people involved in protests and campaigns against cut-backs and under-funding of our public services, against the illegal occupation of Iraq, against bin charges, water charges and the privatisation of the ESB, An Post and other public services. People are sick of the corruption, greed and lies of politicians and the growing inequality between the rich and poor.

We must continue to mobilise that opposition and anger to fight. However, we must also begin to construct an alternative left that both stands for and actively fights for a radical redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, and end to privatisation, decent investment in public services, an end to collaboration with US imperialism, an end to racist discrimination and for genuine democracy.

In Northern Ireland, the Socialist and Environmental Alliance are trying to build such an alternative. In the Republic there are people both to the left of Sinn Fein, Labour and the Greens (and inside those parties), community activists, trade union activists etc who see the need for such an alternative left.

Are we to allow the anger dissipate into disillusionment or are we really going to fight to make another world possible? The decision is ours.

Unions must back us bin workers

I AM one of the many council bin workers who support the anti-bin tax campaigners.

As well as charging people for this public service, management is trying to force through changes in our working conditions.

Clearly, they are preparing the service for privatisation.

Because of the traffic chaos on Dublin's roads, we never know when we are going to finish [a shift].

Management is trying to ram through a deal which will see us paid only two hours overtime no matter how long we actually work.

We are also being threatened with suspension from work if we don't leave the bins of non-payers. They are trying to bully us into breaking health and safety regulations so that we are in conflict with the general public who are protesting.

They are saying we must finish the routes even if protests are blocking us and they insist that they will use the guards to break the protests.

We do not want to be used by the Government and management against protesters. SIPTU and IMPACT must come out on the side of workers in the depots and stop backing up management.

The fact that I can't sign this letter for fear of reprisals from management and union officials is an indictment

of our union's attitude to the bin tax.

With the proper support of our unions, bin workers could unite with the campaigners and defeat this stealth tax and our public services could be kept in public hands.

**DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL
WORKER**



Needed: more union support

Hotel Rwanda and worthless African life

Terry George is in LA next week hoping to come home with an Oscar for Best Screenplay for Hotel Rwanda.

But his journey is more purposeful than that: he is bringing the heroic story of Paul Rusesabagina to as wide an audience as possible.

Set during the genocide in Rwanda, the film's most poignant moment is when Paul realises that "they" are not coming to help.

Terry George, by sharing this story of one man who helps thousands, shames the audience when we realise the extent to which the West completely abandoned these people.

Terry George took questions from the audience after showing the film at the Jameson Dublin Film Festival and when the lack of intervention was addressed, Terry spoke of the West's disregard for African life.

This is ever more prevalent today. We were shocked and disturbed by the effects of the Tsunami, to such an extent that we emptied our pockets.

In the UK, 85% of Britons donated a sum of £365 million. (The Times, 14th Feb 2005)

The Irish public was generous to the tune of €48 million plus a government donation of €20 million. (RTE.ie, 17th Feb 2005)

The World Bank president even praised us. Charities are overwhelmed and are having difficulty managing and spending the funds.

The latest figures account for 175,000 dead throughout up to 10 countries as a result of the Tsunami.

The genocide of Rwanda counted a death toll of one million.

Approximately one million people were slaughtered in a

period of around 100 days in one country.

So should we be proud of our generosity?

Personally, I didn't donate to the Tsunami disaster. So many others were already doing so.

I felt that other areas of the world were being neglected as the focus was placed on one area.

The Tsunami was devastating and without underestimating the extent of destruction and assistance the countries need, we must remember that a wave of death as big as the Tsunami hits Africa every day.

Rwanda is one of the most shameful examples, but why aren't we so generous to this continent?

Is it because our tourists weren't out there? Or because we see African life as worthless? NATALIE, Dublin



The Eamonn McCann column

WHERE NOW FOR THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT?

THE GOVERNMENTS and mainstream parties want rid of the IRA because its very existence is a challenge to established ideas of law and order and to the stability of the Northern and Southern States.

In the wake of the Northern Bank robbery and the murder of Robert McCartney, they are demanding that Sinn Fein ditch the military wing and lead their followers into full acceptance of the political and constitutional set-up.

The socialist objection to the IRA is different.

The Governments are encouraged by the fact that the Provisional IRA is less popular today than at any time in the last quarter century in the working-class Catholic areas of the North where it has been most deeply-rooted. This isn't on account of the supposed immorality of robbing a bank. But the multi-million pound, transnational money operation in which the IRA was subsequently shown to have been involved clearly had nothing to do with leading people to liberation, in any sense of the phrase, or with ending partition. Instead, it indicated that IRA activities aren't exactly aligned with the interests of the people in whose name it purports to act. The IRA was hanging out with a different class of people entirely.

The brutal killing of Robert McCartney illustrates the same point.

Some former members and supporters of Sinn Fein and/or the IRA have concluded that what's needed is a reformed or refurbished Republican Movement, with a leadership committed to true Republican ideals rather than to personal or political advancement. They largely attribute the current debacle to bad leadership, wrong turnings or sinister motivation on the part of Gerry Adams and his associates. This is an inadequate conclusion.

At the heart of the tradition in which this newspaper stands is the idea that socialism must come from below. That it cannot be imposed or bestowed upon the working class from above, whether by parliamentarians or paramilitaries, but can be accomplished only by working-class people themselves organising in their workplaces and communities to advance their situation, ultimately to overthrow the capitalist system.

Commentators have contrasted the role of the IRA in the 1970s in the Short Strand, where Robert McCartney lived, and the role now exemplified by the IRA members involved in his killing. Once they were protectors of the community, it is said. Now they are oppressors. There is

truth in this as far as it goes. But it misses the connection between the IRA then and now.

The IRA may on occasion have given the community physical protection, particularly in the circumstances of the early '70s. But it was never answerable or accountable to the community. It has sometimes styled itself the 'peoples army'. But it organises and operates out of sight of the people. It was and is, necessarily, a clandestine organisation. Its members are oath-bound to give total allegiance to paramilitary chiefs who, far from finding validation in endorsement by the people, must keep their very identities hidden from the people.

This is true of the IRA in defender as well as oppressor mode. It is one of the keys to understanding the transition.

Every ruling class voice is currently raised high urging Republicans to ditch paramilitarism, become totally respectable and join the conservative consensus. Forgiveness and glittering prizes are on offer to those who accept. This would represent abandonment of struggle. The SWP urges Republicans who think of themselves also as socialists to turn not to the Right but to the socialist ideas of self-liberation which alone offer a road forward.

REVIEWS

ARTHUR MILLER:

Death of a social critic

By SINEAD KENNEDY

WITH THE death of playwright, Arthur Miller, the world has lost one of the most unique, and passionate voices, who wrote two of the 20th-century's most durable dramatic myths, *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *The Crucible* (1953).

Miller was born in New York in 1915 into a family of Polish immigrants. He grew up in the midst of the Great Depression and his work reflected the social preoccupations he witnessed. He saw, for a time, in Marxism a way out: "Marxism seemed to be the key to our problems. Money was in the wrong hands. We needed to rebuild our society."

Miller joined the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) in 1938. The FTP was part of Roosevelt's New Deal. Its function was to provide jobs for the unemployed workers in the theatre industry. The project was destroyed by US Congress who believed it had become too left-wing. Yet, in its short existence the Federal Theater played to more than 12 million people in New York City alone, and it was where people like Miller, Orson Welles and John Houseman learned their craft.

Following the collapse of the FTP Miller began working on Broadway. The Broadway of the 1940 and 50s was a kind of public forum where theatre audiences were immersed in the politics of the day, led by spectacular performers, directors, artists



and writers: Miller, Eli Kazan, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and actors like Marlon Brando, Jessica Tandy and Lee J Cobb

In 1940, moved by the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish civil war and the appeasement of fascism, he wrote his first major play, *The Golden Years*. The play deals with the subject of genocide in 16th-century Mexico and would mark the beginning of a pattern in Miller's

work whereby he would write about the horrors of the twentieth century from the distance of history.

It was with *Death of a Salesman* that he reached the acme of success, a powerful drama about the fragility and precariousness of human life. The central character Willy Loman is a slave to the American dream, enslaved by the need to keep up appearances outside it. Willy freefalls through life following this

false dream and the price he pays is enormous. He destroys his sons and himself, becoming a man, who is worth more, dead than alive.

By the 1950s the US was in the grip of McCarthyism and the arts became one of its first targets. In response, Miller wrote his most politically powerful play, *The Crucible*. The play used the seventeenth century Salem witch trials as an allegory for contemporary America. Miller himself was subpoenaed to appear in front of Congress. He refused to denounce any of his left-wing friends, declaring that, "I do not believe that a man has to become an informer to be able to continue practicing his profession freely in the United States". He was found guilty of contempt, and had his passport withdrawn.

Miller was a strong opponent of the Korean and Vietnam wars. He believed in the causality of human behavior, that people have to take responsibility for what they do and, for what they know others to be doing.

Throughout his long career Miller provoked dissent from both the left and the right. He was in the words of one critic 'too intellectual for Broadway, and too "Broadway" for the intellectuals. Gore Vidal begged him to stop telling people what they already knew. But this is what great writers do and Miller was one of the best.

BOOK:

Dragons and revolution

Epic is a new fantasy book aimed at younger readers, which has been gathering critical acclaim, with, for example, Celia Keenan of The Sunday Independent writing, 'this is, in my view, the most important Irish novel of this year.' The author, Conor Kostick, is a member of the Socialist Workers Party, and he spoke to Socialist Worker about the book.

I GOT the idea for Epic from reading an article written by an economist about the growth of online computer games.

It really is extraordinary how fast they are developing. In the Far East four million people subscribe to one game alone. In the US the two most popular online fantasy games have over 500,000 and 400,000 players respectively.

And inevitably these huge virtual communities are having an impact on the real world, as players sell off their powerful weapons, magic items, properties and even their long cherished characters themselves.

The point of the article was to make the surprising statement that the entire real dollar activity of these virtual creations was larger than the GNP of Bulgaria.

So the premise for Epic came about from wondering - what would it be like to live in a world entirely dominated by one game; where every human being had to log into the game and their wealth, their political voice, their future, was shaped by how well they were doing in the game?

What would happen to those who became the games most powerful players, and thus the most wealth and powerful people in the world?

Would they start to dominate the proceedings and protect themselves

from challenges? And if you were born poor and had to make your way through the game from scratch, what chance would you have?

Since I wrote the book, I've come across examples of companies setting up in low wage countries and employing people to generate virtual items in these games which they then sell for dollars on Internet trading sites.

Another US author has since written an interesting short story where a union organiser has to create a character inside of a game in order to defend the living standards of these workers.

At one level Epic is an adventure in a magical setting, complete with vampires, pirates and paladins. In that sense it can appear to belong to the same genre as the Harry Potter series.

But essentially what J. K. Rowling is doing - and I don't say this as a criticism - is continuing the Enid Blyton tradition of stories set in the framework of the English public school system.

I would prefer to see Epic as more in line with the work of Ursula Le Guin, who uses fantasy to create moral and political dilemmas for her characters.

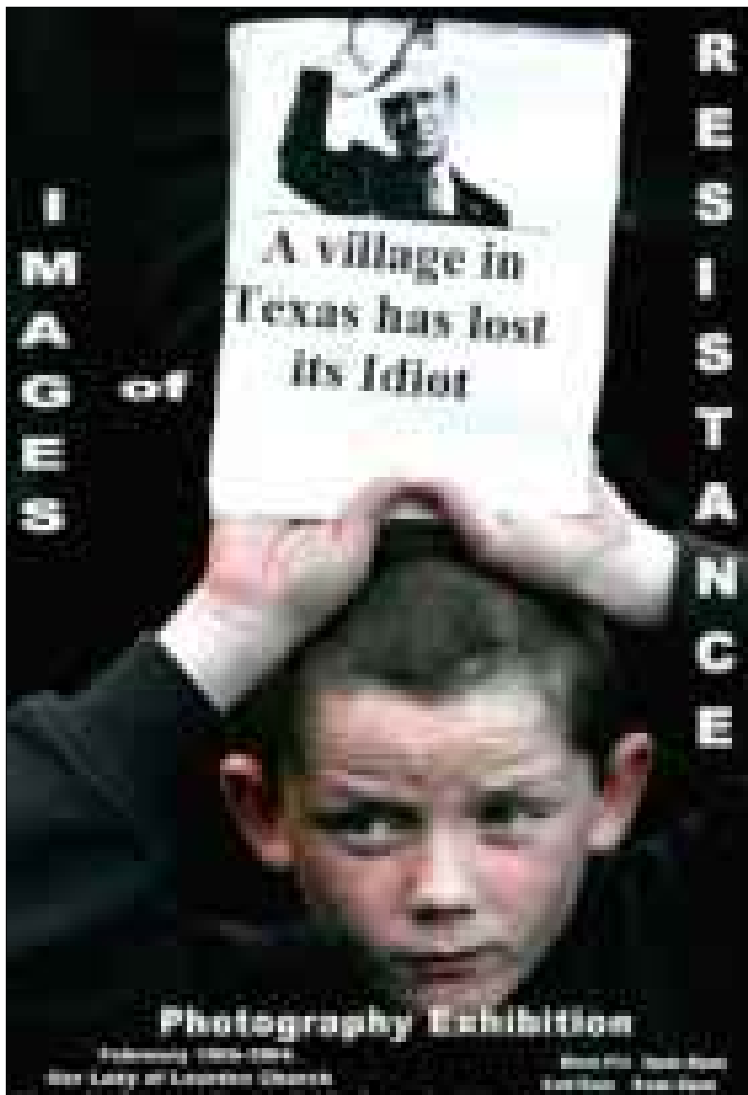
In Epic there is a happy fusion between solving the problems of society and playing the game, which means I can describe a revolution and still have battles with dragons and evil monsters.

But more than one character begins to look outside the rules of the game; in fact the book is discreetly infused with a variety of philosophical traditions.

Epic, Conor Kostick, O'Brien Press, €7.95

EXHIBITION: DUBLIN ANTIWAR PHOTO SHOW:

Images of Resistance



Exhibition continues until March 7th in Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Sean McDermott St, Dublin 1. Opening times: Mon-Fri. 9am-8pm Sat/Sun. 9am-6pm This photographic exhibition is an accumulation of five years work from four different photographers - Paul Mattsson, Guy Smallman, from the UK, Michael Gallagher and Paula Geraghty

THEATRE BRIEFS

New Friel play

A new play by Brian Friel has to be the theatre event of the year. The Home Place runs at the Gate Theatre in Dublin until March 26th.

Friel, now in his seventies has produced his most accomplished play since *Dancing at Lughnasa* fifteen years ago.

He returns to familiar territory, the fictional Ballybeg in Donegal and the conflict that is at the heart of so much of his work - the struggle between the "possessors and those who believe they are dispossessed".

The age old conflict between the Big House and the peasantry can simply be seen as a metaphor for the situation in Northern Ireland today; the shared predicament of "Planter and Gael".

But Friel is too good a writer for such simple fare. The past and the present, the personal and the political are woven into a drama that is as good as anything he has produced in the past.

Brecht feast

The Life of Galileo: Bertolt Brecht, Project Theatre Dublin, from February 17th.

Brecht tells the remarkable story of this famous scientist's life. Set in 17th century Italy, at the height of the Inquisition, Brecht's play is a study of his genius, humanity and courage and examines how truth can be suppressed and manipulated for political reasons.

The play reverberates across time and has always been produced during periods of great political uncertainty. Rough Magic's timely production of this great classic places the story in the context of contemporary global politics.

The Threepenny Opera: Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, Helix Theatre Dublin, from March 21st. This classic work bristles with universal themes - justice, greed, charity, pretension and misused love. A boisterous tale of beggars, thieves and easy virtue, creating a drama that incorporates popular music and dance.

BOOK BRIEFS

Fiery Heart: The First life of Leigh Hunt: Nicholas Roe (Pimlico, £14.99 Stg.).

Fiery Heart tells the story of Leigh Hunt, a man almost totally forgotten, but in his day a poet and radical who associated with Byron and Shelley and were part of a culture of dissent at the beginning of the 18th century.

His campaigning on liberal issues marks him out as one of the great reformers of the age.

He was a poet, essayist and theatre critic, but above all, he was the editor of the Examiner, the most outspoken radical journal of its time, founded with his brother John in 1808.

The Examiner sounds modern in its defence of civil rights and liberties and its campaign for religious toleration and its exposed the of the inhumanity of the slave trade. Hunt spent two years in jail defending the principle of free speech.

Roe places Hunt in the tradition of the radical reformers and poets who were inspired by the traditions of the French Revolution.

The anti-war movement and March 19th: What have the protests achieved?

By **RICHARD BOYD BARRETT**,
Chairperson Irish Anti War Movement

JUST OVER two years ago, on February 15th 2003, the largest global demonstration on a single day took place to protest against the planned US assault on Iraq. However, the invasion of Iraq went ahead and 100,000 Iraqis have so far lost their lives.

Does this mean such protests have no effect? Such a view is, I believe, mistaken.

Huge protests at the WTO, IMF meetings and gatherings of the G8 have forced the issues of global justice such as debt, aid and trade onto the political agenda in a way they have never been before.

Now Tony Blair and even George Bush at least verbally accept the need for debt relief and political action on world poverty. Indeed, the huge protests over Iraq have forced them to say something about Africa in an attempt to rebuild their shattered credibility.

Back in the late 1980's and early 1990's the slogan of Margaret Thatcher and neo-liberals was "There is No Alternative".

"Another World is Possible"

This world view has been replaced since Seattle and even more so since the huge February 15th anti-war protests with the slogan and belief that "Another World is Possible".

But the importance of the new movements of mass protest goes beyond simply turning the tide in the battle of ideas.

The February 15th anti-war protests came close to stopping the US assault on Iraq - the scale of opposition to the war in Europe forced the German and French government's to oppose the conflict.

In Britain, the British Labour Party was divided over the war and has faced a permanent political crisis for over two years now.



Had Labour MP Clare Short resigned earlier Blair might well have been forced out of office.

This huge turmoil arose directly from demonstrations that were the biggest in British history.

In Spain, of course, the protests were so big that when the bomb blast took place in Madrid it signed the death warrant of the Aznar government and forced the new government to withdraw its troops from Iraq.

Yes, the US went ahead with the war but its credibility is in tatters. There can be little doubt this has raised the confidence of Iraqis to resist the US occupation. It has certainly had an impact on both the British and US armed forces where the number of soldiers refusing to

fight on political grounds has been rising steadily.

The biggest obstacle to US plans to launch attacks on Iran and Syria

The combined effect of Iraqi resistance and the enormous global movement against the war has probably been the biggest obstacle to US plans to launch attacks on Iran and Syria.

The ideologues of the Project for a New American Century, who drive the policy of the Bush administration, have made clear their aim to topple both regimes.

Yet, in reality, the US has major problems holding down Iraq, never mind moving elsewhere. These problems will deepen over the coming months as it becomes clear to Iraqis that

the US military have no intention of withdrawing post elections.

Governments like the British, which braved the storm of protest against the Iraq war and the lies about weapons of mass destruction, would find it very difficult to hold together if they now supported a war on Iran or Syria.

It took over ten years for the Vietnamese resistance and the global anti-war movement to force the US to end that war and for the first few years the protests over Vietnam were very small.

Even as they grew bigger at the end of the sixties there were often long gaps between major mobilisations.

Yet caught between the hammer of Vietnamese resistance and the anvil of rising mass opposition to the war in the US itself, a Republican Richard Nixon was finally forced to pull US troops out.

Its declining economic position is pushing it to war but is also its weakness

Today the US is in an even weaker position that it was at the end of the sixties, being faced with growing economic rivalry from China, Europe and a huge budget deficit. Its declining economic position is pushing it to war but it is also its weakness.

The Global Day of protest on March 19th will be a vital chance to put the bloody occupation of Iraq back on the agenda, when Bush, Blair and Bertie hope it will disappear onto the back pages of the papers.

It will be a critical chance to raise now the flag of opposition to plans for war on Iran and Syria. Organising for the protest will also be an important chance to re-galvanise the anti-war movement in preparation for the next crisis that Bush's war produces. Any movement will have peaks and troughs, but the tide of opposition to war and capitalism is rising steadily. Let's go all out to build for M19 and ensure it keeps moving in that direction.

Irish Anti-War Movement presents

AGAINST WAR, OCCUPATION & EMPIRE

-A Forum

★Speakers include Ahmed Ben Bella, Haifa Zangana, Denis Halliday & more.
March 4th, 5th & 6th, Central Dublin

It will begin on Friday March 4th with a screening of the famous film Battle for Algiers about the Algerian liberation struggle. The film will be introduced by Ahmed Ben Bella, the leader of that struggle, who went on to be the first president of Algeria when the French were driven out. Speakers include: Eamonn Mc Cann, John Gormley TD, Ali Halimeh (Palestine - Delegate General in Ireland), Vincent Browne, Joe Higgins TD, Kieran Allen (Author & Sociologist), Catriona Ruane MLA (Bring them Home Campaign), Mick Mc Gaughan (Irish Times Journalist & Author), Andy Storey (Afrl),

Venues: Irish Film Institute, Temple Bar (Friday March 4th) Royal Dublin Hotel, O'Connell St (March 5th & 6th)

Tickets: Weekend (excluding screening) €15/10 (conc); Day ticket €10/7.50 (conc) available from Irish Anti War Movement, 55 Middle Abbey St, Dublin (Mon/Fri) or phone 01-8727912 / email info@irishantiwar.org www.irishantiwar.org

Special Screening of The Battle of Algiers

With Intro from Ahmed Ben Bella

Friday March 4th Irish Film Institute, Temple Bar, 6.00-8.45pm



International Women's Day

March 8th

Ann Roster speaks on her experience of back street abortions. Organised by Alliance for Choice contact: 086 2612634

Socialist Worker Forums

Rialto: Socialism and Republicanism: Wed 23rd, 8.30pm: St Andrew's Community Hall

Galway: The rise and fall of the US empire: Speaker: Richard Boyd Barrett: Thurs 24th Feb 8pm Javas Coffee shop, Abbeigate st

Tralee: Socialism and republicanism: Speaker: Donal Mac Fhearraigh Thurs 24th Feb 6pm Abbeigate Hotel

Clondalkin: Iran; Bush's next target: Thurs 24th Feb, 8.30pm Upstairs, Steering Wheel,

Blanchardstown: Socialism and Republicanism: Wed 2nd March, 8pm Laurel Lodge Community Centre

Ballyfermot: Iran: Bush's next target Wed 2nd March, 8pm Contact 087 9090166

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

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

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

REVOLUTION

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

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

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

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

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

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

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

working class.

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

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

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

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

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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

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

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

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

Join the Socialists

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

Name.....

Address.....

Email.....

Phone.....



MARCH 19

**GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION AGAINST
THE OCCUPATION OF IRAQ**

**DUBLIN: 2.00 pm
Parnell Square
BELFAST: 2.00 pm
Arts College**

Socialist **Worker**

€1.00/£0.70p

NO 237 | FEBRUARY 22-MARCH 8, 2005

WWW.SWP.IE

INSIDE FALLUJAH: DEMOCRACY U.S.-STYLE

Doctor Salam Ismael took aid to Fallujah last month. This is his story of how the US murdered a city

IT WAS the smell that first hit me, a smell that is difficult to describe, and one that will never leave me. It was the smell of death.

Hundreds of corpses were decomposing in the houses, gardens and streets of Fallujah. Bodies were rotting where they had fallen—bodies of men, women and children, many half-eaten by wild dogs.

A wave of hate had wiped out two-thirds of the town, destroying houses and mosques, schools and clinics. This was the terrible and frightening power of the US military assault.

The accounts I heard over the next few days will live with me forever. You may think you know what happened in Fallujah.

But the truth is worse than you could possibly have imagined.

In Saqlawiya, one of the makeshift refugee camps that surround Fallujah, we found a 17 year old woman. "I am Hudda Fawzi Salam Issawi from the Jolan district of Fallujah," she told me. "Five of us, including a 55 year old neighbour, were trapped together in our house in Fallujah when the siege began.

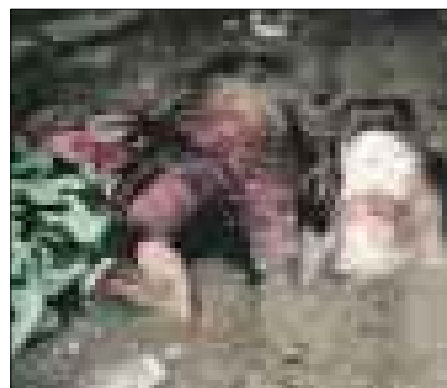
"On 9 November American marines came to our house. My father and the neighbour went to the door to meet them. We were not fighters. We thought we had nothing to fear. I ran into the kitchen to put on my veil, since men were going to enter our house and it would be wrong for them to see me with my hair uncovered.

"This saved my life. As my father and neighbour approached the door, the Americans opened fire on them. They died instantly.

I had come to Fallujah in January as part of a humanitarian aid convoy funded by donations from Britain.

Our small convoy of trucks and vans brought 15 tons of flour, eight tons of rice, medical aid and 900 pieces of clothing for the orphans. We knew that thousands of refugees were camped in terrible conditions in four camps on the outskirts of town.

There we heard the accounts of families killed in their houses, of wounded people dragged into the streets and run over by tanks, of a container with the bodies of 481 civilians inside, of premeditated murder, looting and acts of savagery and cruelty that



Murdered: young boy found dead in a house in the Jolan quarter of Fallujah (top). Bodies of two children found in their garden (below, left). A father who had tried to shield his two daughters, found dead in a bedroom (below, right)

beggar belief.

Through the ruins

That is why we decided to go into Fallujah and investigate. When we entered the town I almost did not recognise the place where I had worked as a doctor in April 2004, during the first siege.

We found people wandering like ghosts

through the ruins. Some were looking for the bodies of relatives.

Others were trying to recover some of their possessions from destroyed homes.

Here and there, small knots of people were queuing for fuel or food. In one queue some of the survivors were fighting over a blanket.

I remember being approached by an elderly woman, her eyes raw with tears.

erly woman, her eyes raw with tears.

She grabbed my arm and told me how her house had been hit by a US bomb during an air raid. The ceiling collapsed on her 19 year old son, cutting off both his legs.

She could not get help. She could not go into the streets because the Americans had posted snipers on the roofs and were killing anyone who ventured out, even at night.

She tried her best to stop the bleeding, but it was to no avail. She stayed with him, her only son, until he died. He took four hours to die.

Fallujah's main hospital was seized by the US troops in the first days of the siege. The only other clinic, the Hey Nazzal, was hit twice by US missiles. Its medicines and medical equipment were all destroyed.

There were no ambulances—the two ambulances that came to help the wounded were shot up and destroyed by US troops.

We visited houses in the Jolan district, a poor working class area in the north western part of the city that had been the centre of resistance during the April siege.

This quarter seemed to have been singled out for punishment during the second siege. We moved from house to house, discovering families dead in their beds, or cut down in living rooms or in the kitchen.

House after house had furniture smashed and possessions scattered.

In some places we found bodies of fighters, dressed in black and with ammunition belts.

But in most of the houses, the bodies were of civilians. Many were dressed in housecoats, many of the women were not veiled—meaning there were no men other than family members in the house. There were no weapons, no spent cartridges.

It became clear to us that we were witnessing the aftermath of a massacre, the cold-blooded butchery of helpless and defenceless civilians.

Nobody knows how many died. The occupation forces are now bulldozing the neighbourhoods to cover up their crime.

What happened in Fallujah was an act of barbarity. The whole world must be told the truth.

■ **For more on Fallujah go to www.swp.ie**