

Socialist Worker

€1.00/£0.70p

NO. 267 | JANUARY 2007

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Photo: Paula

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90,000 Polish arrivals in 2006, we say:

WITAJCIE! WELCOME



Trade unionists of all nationalities demonstrated in support of Irish Ferries workers a year ago

Two hundred thousand immigrants came to Ireland in 2006, overwhelmingly young, educated and willing to work hard; they nevertheless have received a bitter welcome. More than half of them left again during the year.

It is hardly surprising that immigrant workers are disillusioned on entering Ireland. They find extraordinarily high prices, especially for accommodation, alongside massive prejudice.

The rot starts at the top. The Government and employers want low-paid immigrant workers to assist the economy, but they also have encouraged divisions in the working class movement by fueling discrimination. FF and the PD's have, for example, introduced work restrictions on the new European accession states: Romania and Bulgaria. No person from these countries will be allowed to work in Ireland without their employers proving that someone else from the EU could not do the work. They will not qualify for social welfare.

The opposition, including Labour, has also sent out the message that immigrant workers are troublesome. Pat Rabbitte por-

trayed Eastern European workers as being responsible for the 'displacement' of better paid Irish workers. But there is no evidence for dole queues lengthening with Irish workers who have been supplanted by immigrants. In fact there are still shortages for workers in unskilled menial jobs. No wonder. The conditions and pay of thousands of jobs in Ireland are disgraceful, as immigrant workers are finding out.

Socialist Worker spoke to some Polish workers about their experience.

Tomek is 40 years old. He owned his own company in Poland, but as it was struggling, he left it to join his girlfriend in Ireland.

She had been unable to get a job in Poland due to the 23% unemployment level there. After five months in Ireland, Tomek gave in to a corrupt system that obliged him to pay €500 for a job. 'It doesn't matter what your CV looks like,' he explained, 'if you have bad English, it's who you know.'

'I got a job in a warehouse, moving heavy carpets. I worked seven days a week, for €6 an hour, cash in hand. I had no PPS and I was treated like dirt. It was exhaust-

ing and the customers sometimes abused me for being Polish.'

Eventually, Tomek moved jobs to one where, after three months, he got a contract. But even then it was obvious that there was no prospect of promotion for Polish workers 'and that's the case everywhere.'

Ania is 26 and has a degree in English and education. She has been doing white-collar work through agencies and has also seen discrimination against Polish workers. 'At work they watch how long we spend on our breaks, in a different way to their attitude to Irish workers. They are much stricter on our targets. I've seen Irish agency workers let go with proper notice, but Polish workers are just dismissed on the spot, not even with a thank you, but a call to the agency.'

She also has concerns about the hostility to Polish people that exists in sections of the Irish population. 'I don't feel secure among Irish people, except those who are my friends. A lot of clubs and bars in Dublin demand we show our passports and they refuse entry to the Polish.'

'We are the people who get the filthy jobs and it is easy to degrade

us, but most of us have more education than the Irish people in similar work.'

Even friendly people, when they find out I work at a bank say "oh, do you clean there?" The majority of educated Polish people hate it here and would leave if Poland had a better economic situation.'

Those Polish families trying to make a life here have also noticed discrimination in the schools. As Jasia put it 'the children ought to mix together, that's what we would like.'

But all the non-Irish at our children's school are put on a table together, so they don't integrate.

Sometimes they come home unhappy and when we ask them, we find out it is because their table never gets the sweets that are given out as prizes for good work.'

The socialist movement has had a long and proud tradition of seeing all workers, no matter what their nationality, as brothers and sisters.

That tradition is needed more than ever before in Ireland in 2007. It is the spirit that will be needed to fight against the real cause of low wages and pressure at work: the greed of the employers.

QUOTES OF THE FORTNIGHT

'This government is on its way out. They have lost a lot among their voters. I now regret ever voting for those monsters.'

A Shi'ite government worker responds to the execution of Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Muslim,

'This is government by revenge. Saddam Hussein is our leader and now he is a martyr of history. We will turn ourselves into bombs to avenge him.'

Sabah al-Shamri, a former colonel in Saddam's Republican Guard,

'Suddenly we forgot that he was a dictator and that he killed thousands of people. All our hatred for him suddenly turned into sympathy, sympathy with someone who was treated unjustly by an occupation force and its collaborators.'

Roula Haddad a Lebanese Christian, on Saddam's execution

'The Iraqi people refuse to allow the future of their oil to be decided behind closed doors. The occupier seeks and wishes to secure ...energy resources at a time when the Iraqi people are seeking to determine their own future, while still under conditions of occupation.'

Iraqi trade union leaders respond to legislation under discussion to allow British and US oil companies to extract crude oil from Iraqi oil fields.

'Some countries got this wrong where they just had different nationalities all over the place, with Chinatowns all over the place, where east and west never met . . . Ideally, everyone living in Ireland should be able to speak English. It is easier to avail of services, it's easier to integrate.'

Seamus Brennan, Social Affairs Minister.

'I will support Enda Kenny up to the next election but if he is not Taoiseach there will be a challenge. I will challenge him myself, if necessary. If he fails this time, there should be a generational change. It will be time for a younger generation, even after a narrow defeat.'

John Deasy, Fine Gael TD, throws the party into chaos

'We are going to see a spike in inflation this month.'

Finance Minister Brian Cowen predicting that inflation could push through the 5% barrier this month, with a range of price hikes and soaring energy costs.

'I'd love to know. And I'd bury them. But I don't know. But somebody was. Somebody had fairly calculated and manipulatively planned this out. But I don't know. I could get lucky some day if I find out.'

Bertie Ahern, talking about the person responsible for revealing to the Irish Times that he took money from friends totaling €50,000 in the mid 1990s.

There's another gas robbery on the way



Shell to Sea protest last year

While many people are aware of the environmental and financial scandal taking place off the coast of Mayo, they may be unaware of another potential financial rip-off that is taking place off the coast of Kerry and is valued at over €20 billion.

Drilling has yet to start, but seismic exploration has already pinpointed two large oil and gas prospects 125 miles south west of the Kerry coast in the Dunquin Field.

Tony O'Reilly's company, Providence Resources, who have a stake in the find, estimated that it could contain over 25 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas and over four billion barrels of oil; a significant find even by international

standards.

Last year the government gave Providence Resources and Sosina Exploration of Scotland, the rights to explore and exploit the Dunquin Field.

Now these two companies have allowed US corporate giant, Exxon Mobil, the largest private energy company in the world, an 80% share in the project, while they keep the remaining 20%, 7.25% is owned personally by Tony O'Reilly.

It is therefore not surprising that the Independent group of newspapers, which are owned by O'Reilly, have been so hostile to the Shell to Sea campaign. Instead of originally giving the explora-

tion licence to Providence and Sosina, Minister Noel Dempsey could have dealt directly with Exxon Mobil and thus at kept a 20% stake for the Irish people.

The ridiculous situation of crude oil being piped directly to tankers and shipped to the US and Britain, thus making no contribution whatsoever to the Irish economy, could very soon become a distinct reality.

Since the summer of last year, Kerry Shell to Sea has been extremely active in opposing Shell's operation in Mayo and more recently Exxon Mobil's activities off the Kerry coast, holding public meetings, stalls and pickets outside Shell and Statoil petrol stations.

Facts behind the health crisis

According to the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland (RCPI) there are an insufficient number of doctors in the Department of Medicine in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda to ensure patients are not at risk

■ Raw sewage at the back of hospital seven on the St. James's Hospital complex in Dublin was left untreated for four days after it was reported to staff by hospital visitors. Hospital management did manage to clear it in the space of hours when a Newstalk radio reporter contacted them and broke the story.

■ Both the Medical Council and the RCPI have expressed serious and urgent concerns about the running of the A&E unit in

Navan hospital. There is no A&E consultant on duty except between 9am and 5pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Junior doctors without supervision run the department the rest of the time

■ There are currently over 2,000 people on waiting lists in Tallaght Hospital. Meanwhile more than 15,000 adults are awaiting surgery in 36 hospitals around the country

■ The Irish Nurses Organisation members at St Munchins Maternity Hospital in Limerick have requested the Labour Relations Commission investigate staffing shortages in the hospital. Midwives have been raising their concerns with hospital management for the last 18 months but no

action has been taken to solve the growing crisis

■ A recent report by the Irish Cancer Society and GPs reveals that 69% of private patients compared with less than 6% of public patients had to wait two weeks or less for a mammogram. Almost 50% of women in the public system had to wait 12 weeks or more.

■ The country's most highly rated public hospital, in a website survey of 4,200 people is St Luke's Cancer Hospital in Rathgar, Dublin. Ironically this is one of the Dublin hospitals that will be closed over coming years as facilities are centralised in so-called centres of 'excellence'.

INSIDE THE SYSTEM

Many politicians have seized on the recent spate of 'gangland' killings as an excuse to push a law and order agenda.

Hardly any mention was made, however, of the underlying drugs problem and the lack of resources available for treatment for users.

One shocking statistic illustrates the point: there are less than thirty detox beds available to the country's 15,000 opiate users.

Recently released FBI documents on the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay throws further light on the extent of the abuse perpetrated by military personnel.

The Pentagon dismissed the report, saying action had already been taken on the issues it raised.

The American Civil Liberties Union, however, has called for a comprehensive investigation, not just into the allegations but also into the causes and policies that

led directly to the mistreatment.

The economy is much stronger than anyone predicted this time last year. The exchequer surplus stands at a record €2.2 billion. Yet a quick look at the state of our hospitals (above) belies this wealth.

The rate of AIDS infection in Cambodia has dropped steadily over the last ten years due to the availability of free condoms, grassroots education campaigns and the availability

of cheap, generic anti-retroviral drugs. This is a huge achievement and a clear vindication of the importance of promoting safe sex and the use of condoms in all countries devastated by the AIDS epidemic.

Over 100,000 Irish workers have recently experienced bullying at work, according to a new survey by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). The full report is due to be published next month.

Socialist Worker

EDITORIAL

Bush tries one 'last surge' in Iraq

George Bush has decided on one last 'surge' to try to rescue the US empire from defeat in Iraq. This bloody, futile adventure is only designed to salvage the tattered reputation of US imperialism.

The background to this dreadful escalation is two key defeats that the US suffered this summer. First, a much vaunted offensive by the US army to re-take Sadr city in Baghdad failed miserably. This led to a deep questioning of the war, with even key figures in the US establishment mooting the possibility of withdrawal.

Then, when the US ally Israel tried to launch a war against Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, they also suffered a humiliating defeat.

Once the myth of Israel's invincibility was destroyed, a passionate anti-imperialism swept the 'Arab street' and threatened to target long standing US allies such as the Egyptian and Jordanian regimes.

These defeats have dramatically strengthened the anti-war movement in the US. The elections to the US Congress led to a Democratic take over and a recent NBC poll showed that 70 percent of the US people want that Congress to enforce a withdrawal on Bush.

For a period it looked like US imperialism might start a tactical withdrawal to huge military bases. The Iraq Study Group, which has dominated by older establishment figures that were close to Bush's father, noted that 61 percent of Iraqis favour armed attacks on US forces.

As a solution, it held out the possibility of a diplomatic offensive to prise Syrian away from its alliance with Iran and subsequently to re-open the type of links with Iran that existed during the Afghanistan war.



Bush is sending more troops to Iraq

However against this, other sections of the US ruling class became deeply concerned about the consequences of a second Vietnam style defeat. They know that their economy has weakened against rivals in China and

the Euro zone and only their military prowess gives them tremendous leverage to enforce concessions on their rivals. They feared a resurgence of radicalism in the Middle East that might eventually challenge the very

existence of the Israeli state. And they worried that a defeat in war abroad might feed back into working class resistance at home.

Bush's desperate attempt to snatch victory from the jaws of

defeat contains huge dangers for US imperialism.

The US ruling class is deeply divided and the war party has lost all credibility with the American people. The Democrats won an election by appearing to be anti-war and will come under huge pressure to cut off the funding for the new surge.

Even more ominously, the top brass of the US army have warned Bush not to adopt this course. On November 15th General John P Abizaid told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he opposed the surge strategy while the Washington Post reported that other key generals saw the strategy as 'ill-formed and driven by a desire of the White House to do something different even without a defined purpose'.

The latter point, however, is not fully correct. The aim of the new escalation will be to destroy the more militant Shiite forces around Muqtada al Sadr in order to cement the US alliance with more 'moderate' but deeply sectarian Badr Organisation of the current Iraqi Prime Minister al-Makiki.

This will mean opening a second front in the war and may even enable the US to provoke an intra-Shiite civil war as they have already done with the Sunni-Shiite conflict.

It will lead to more Fallujah style operations and futuristic fantasies from bloated generals who have been planning for many years on how to fight urban warfare in vast Third World cities.

US imperialism has become even more dangerous because it knows it is a cornered animal. The only answer we can give is a further 'surge' in our resistance. That means making Shannon an election issue and mobilizing for further massive demonstrations.

Eyewitness Report from Lebanon

Caoimhe Butterly, who has spent the past five months in Lebanon and who experienced the results of Israel's onslaught last year, will be speaking on her experiences in Lebanon (in both Beirut and the South) and will be highlighting projects that she is currently involved with (including a film project about life in the wake of the Israeli bombardment and invasion). Her first talk will be in Dublin at a public meeting jointly organised by Anti-War Ireland (AWI), Irish Anti-War Movement (IAWM) and the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC). The meeting will be chaired by Raymond Deane of the IPSC. Saturday, 20th January at 2pm Teachers' Club, Parnell Square, Dublin

Nurses set to act over pay and 35 hour week

By Jo Tully
Second Vice President, INO.

A national ballot of nurses for industrial action is taking place over the next three weeks the outcome of which will be announced on 1 February.

The outcome is expected to sanction the beginning of an industrial campaign of action.

Having exhausted all other avenues open to them the Irish Nurses Organization (INO) and The Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA) have again come together in an alliance to press 8 outstanding claims of which two core demands stand out: the demand for a 35 hour week and a 10% increase in salary.

The demand for a 35 hour week is based on the fact that nurses work a 39 hour week unlike all other healthcare professionals i.e. physiotherapists, radiographers, dieticians, laboratory technicians, all clerical staff etc.; all of whom work a 35 hour week or less.

This demand has a long history with The Labour Court. It conceded back in 1980 that in view of the type of work nurses were engaged in they should have reduced working hours.

Bar the reduction of one hour in the early 1990s - from a 40 hour to a

39 hour week - little has come of that Labour Court ruling.

The demand for a 10% salary increase is based on the correction of a wage anomaly which sees social care workers paid up to €3,000 a year more than the nurse for the first 21 years of the nurses working life. Social care workers may or may not have had any training or qualification and are answerable and report to the nurse.

The fact is that nurses work the

longest hours doing probably the toughest job with the more responsibility for the lowest wage of all health care professionals. It is of course no coincidence that over 90% of us are women.

While it is absolutely true that the conditions for patients in our hospitals are appalling, it is also true that the conditions for staff are equally lamentable.

And while these grievances are by no means the only ones, if they

are not dealt with and corrected, the future for both nurses and patients in Ireland looks grim in the extreme.

Up to 70% of young Irish nurses actually leave the country; many never come back.

Some of the deficit has been made up by massive recruitment of nurses from overseas, from the Philippines, India, South Africa, etc., without whom the Health Service would have totally collapsed.

However, only one in two over-

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

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| <p>Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and endangering the planet.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>REVOLUTION</p> <p>The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The courts, the army and police exist to defend the interests of the wealthy.</p> <p>To destroy capitalism, we need to remove the present state structures and create a workers' state based on much</p> | <p>greater political and economic democracy.</p> <p>AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR</p> <p>War is a constant feature of capitalism today as the imperialist powers try to dominate the earth.</p> <p>Bush's "War on Terrorism" is a crude device to attack any country which threatens US military, strategic or economic dominance.</p> <p>END RACISM AND OPPRESSION</p> <p>We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the</p> | <p>working class.</p> <p>We are for full social, economic and political equality for women.</p> <p>We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.</p> <p>FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH</p> <p>We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Blair government.</p> <p>Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'</p> <p>We want to see an Irish workers republic where all</p> | <p>workers gain.</p> <p>Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!</p> <p>FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY</p> <p>To win socialism socialists need to organise in a revolutionary party.</p> <p>This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system.</p> <p>We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.</p> <p>We stand for fighting trade unions and for independent rank and file action.</p> |
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Join the Socialists

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PSNI: Unaccountable with or without Sinn Fein

By Niall McLoughlin

The return of a devolved administration in the North has been thrown into question by disagreement between the DUP and Sinn Fein over the issue of policing.

The decision by Sinn Fein to call an ard fheis on the issue of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and for Gerry Adams to indicate that he would recommend that the party support the PSNI is an historic step.

If the ard fheis votes to support the PSNI and join the new policing structures it will be the last stage in the transformation of the republican movement into a 'respectable' mainstream party that does not threaten the status quo.

The move to recognise the police has led to serious debate inside Sinn Fein by those, including several Assembly members, who are worried that republicans have not gained enough.

One Assembly member, David Hyland, who recently resigned from Sinn Fein, has said that what is needed is a 32-county police force; while the Sinn Fein leadership maintains that its participation in a power sharing government with police and justice powers will ensure a 'democratic and accountable' police service. Both sides in the argument are wrong.

What is missing from the debate is any discussion about the real function of the police or the roots of crime. It is not true that the police exist to fight crime: most crimes go unsolved. Last year in the North official police figures showed that 70 per cent of reported crimes were not 'cleared up' by police. Given that the police find various ways to 'cook the books' to improve crime statistics, and that the figures do not include

unreported crime, it is likely that police solve only a tiny fraction of crime.

Over 150 years ago the great socialist Frederick Engels wrote that at the centre of every capitalist state were special bodies of armed men - the police, the army and so on - who place themselves above the rest of society in order to watch over and defend the interests of the capitalist class. That is the real function of the PSNI and the courts, as will no doubt be demonstrated in the coming battles over water charges.

These 'special bodies of armed men' do not lend themselves to true accountability and the PSNI is no exception. Whether or not Sinn Fein joins a power-sharing executive with police powers, or joins the Policing Board and District Policing Partnerships, the PSNI, the courts and the security services will remain outside of democratic control.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board, which Sinn Fein may shortly join, was set up under the Belfast Agreement as part of a 'new beginning to policing'. It is similar to various 'independent' bodies for the state sector that are designed to give an appearance of democratic control, but in reality exercise little power.

One of the main ways of holding any body to account is to have the power to hold an inquiry into its activities. The PSNI can effectively veto any inquiry into its activities by the Policing Board. The Board can start an inquiry into police actions but if the Chief Constable does not want an investigation he can simply appeal to the Secretary of State in order to refuse to provide a report or to prevent an inquiry from taking place.

Under the legislation that flowed from the Patten Commission, the main duties of the Policing Board are not to hold the police to account but to 'make sure the police in Northern Ireland are effective and efficient.' Police operations remain outside the control of the Board. It does have certain functions, such as providing a forum for questioning senior police officers about police matters, but the police are not under the control of the Board or the District Policing Partnerships.

This does not mean that socialists would argue to ignore or boycott the policing bodies, rather we would seek to use Board meetings as a focus to mobilise campaigns against police harassment and for more resources for young people in deprived communities in both Catholic and Protestant areas.

One thing that both



Flashback: Police in Northern Ireland raid Sinn Fein offices in Stormont

the Sinn Fein leadership and the 'more traditional' republicans agree on is that 'our community needs to be policed'. Again both sides are wrong. They have forgotten one of the les-

sons from the height of the struggle against the northern state. In 1969 and in the early 1970s when the RUC was kept out of large areas of the North, crime virtually disappeared, as people were

inspired to fight for a better society.

Similar battles will take place in the future, but we need to make sure that next time both Catholic and Protestant workers are on

the same side of the barricades. And one thing is certain: people who fight for a better society will be attacked by the police, whether or not Sinn Fein is on the Policing Board.

RAYTHEON NINE IN COURT IN JANUARY



The Raytheon Nine outside the court in January

The failure of the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) to make progress on their case against the Raytheon 9 was criticised by the magistrate before whom they appeared again on 4 January.

Five months after they

occupied and decommissioned the computers in Raytheon's Derry office, the defence teams have still not received any indication of when their trial might start. All nine are still charged with scheduled offences, which means they still face a

non-jury trial in a Diplock court. There has been no word either on whether a tenth member of the Derry Anti War Coalition, Goretti Horgan, will be charged.

The magistrate has asked the PPS to return to the court on 18 January with more information on

how it plans to carry the case forward.

In the meantime, support for the Raytheon 9 continues to pour in from across Ireland and the world. Just before Christmas, over €3,000 was raised by the Rialto anti-war group.

What is missing from the debate is any discussion about the real function of the police or the roots of crime.

INTERNATIONAL

US Proxy War in Somalia

By Peadar O'Grady

The invasion of Somalia by Ethiopian troops is just the latest proxy war in the US/UK 'War on Terror'.

While US-backed Israeli troops were invading its neighbour Lebanon in June 2006, US-backed Ethiopian troops were invading its neighbour Somalia.

In the last two weeks of December 2006, Ethiopian troops swept south to take and occupy Somalia's capital city, Mogadishu. Armed with Mig jets and tanks they vastly outgunned the militias of the United Islamic Courts (UIC).

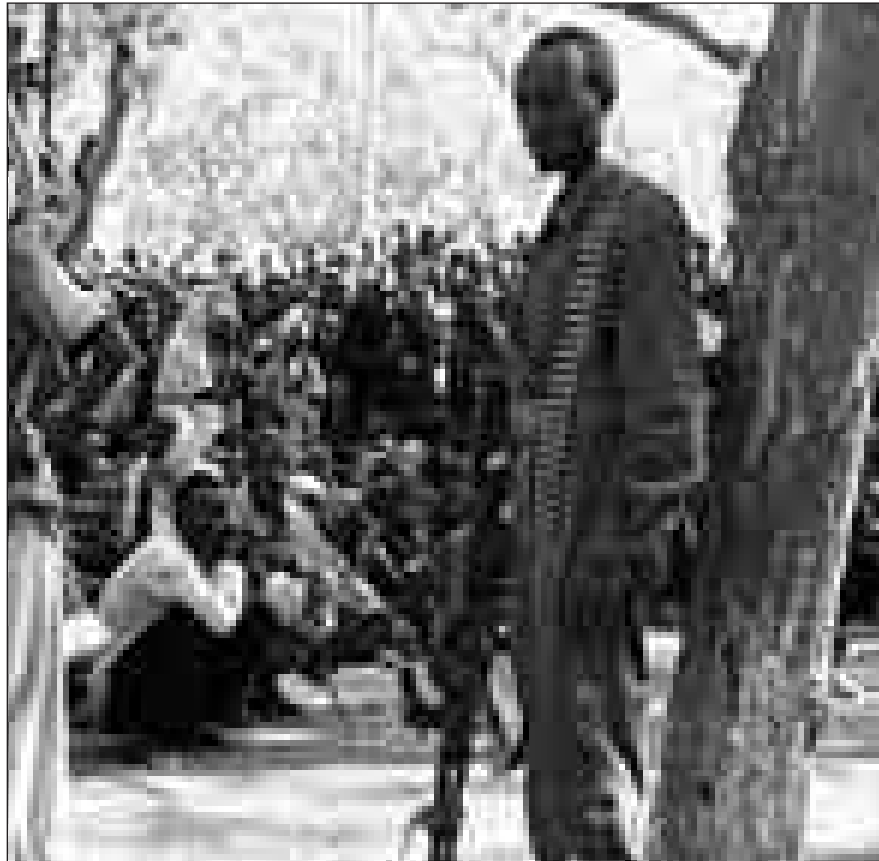
The UIC had recently gained increasing respect and support among Somalis, tired of the bloody rule of clan-based warlords who have dominated Somalia since the overthrow of dictator Siad Barre in 1991.

To counter the increasing power of the Islamic courts, the US backed a 'Transitional Federal Government' (TFG) in 2004. Lacking any real base of support among Somalis the TFG based itself outside the capital in the 2nd city of Baidoa.

US support for the TFG and Ethiopian military interference pushed the UIC, then a loose confederation of 11 Sharia (Islamic law) courts, to form militias in 2005.

These militias received support from nearby Eritrea. Eritrea broke away from Ethiopia after a 30-year civil war, ending in 1991.

Fearing the UIC could form a coherent central government with popular support, the US looked to Ethiopia's Christian president, Meles Zenawi, to invade Somalia and support the TFG. Zenawi complied, keen to benefit from being a key US ally, to deflect attention from his own anti-democratic record and to oppose the rise of an Islamic state allied to Eritrea.



Ethiopian troops occupy Mogadishu

The US previously invaded Somali in 1993, backed by the UN and Canadian troops. They killed and abused civilians and were humiliatingly defeated by a popular uprising and forced to withdraw. Sadly, local warlords remained the main powers in Somalia for over a decade.

In 2002 the US set up a Pentagon 'task force' of 1800 US troops in neighbouring Djibouti to coordinate intervention in the region: known as the 'Horn of Africa'. By early 2006

the CIA were backing the warlords to form an 'anti-terrorist' force to combat the rising power of the UIC. After 4 months of fighting in early 2006, the UIC defeated the warlords and the US asked Ethiopia's Zenawi to send troops into Somalia in June 2006.

A US-backed 'peace-keeping' resolution in the UN gave the green light to Ethiopian troops to launch an all-out attack on the UIC stronghold in the capital Mogadishu. Since the Ethiopian success, the US has requested the Ugandan and Kenyan

governments to send troops under the guise of the African Union (AU).

The UIC represented some slight hope for war-torn Somalia. Despite their harsh punishments - and restrictions on movies, mixed-gender celebrations and women's freedom of movement - the courts drew support for changes that followed the defeat of the warlords.

These included a drop in violence against civilians and a fall in food prices due to the abolition of warlord checkpoints that levied extortionate

'taxes' on transport.

In the new situation a foreign, mainly Christian, US-backed army is backing corrupt warlords and a puppet government against a popular Islamic resistance in Somalia.

This model of intervention in North Africa is plainly a continuation of US imperialism in the neighbouring Middle East. It is clear that the suffering of Somalis will count for nothing in US plans for this region and any other region it casts its imperial eye on.



LETTER FROM SOUTH AMERICA

An Integrated and Independent Continent?

By Antonio Jose

A little reported, yet extremely important meeting took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia, between the heads of states of major South American nations in December 2006, hosted by Evo Morales.

The meeting was convened to discuss the creation of a high level commission that would form the building blocks for a continent-wide community similar to the European union.

The meeting included leaders such as Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Michelle Bachelet of Chile, Alan Garcia of Peru and the new president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa.

New agreements were forged between Chavez and Morales to build a gas separation plant in the gas rich areas of Bolivia; a joint venture between Venezuelan and Bolivian state owned energy companies. Rafael Correa of Ecuador proposed a land and river route to the Pacific coast from Brazil as a South American alternative to the Panama Canal and the feud between Alan Garcia of Peru and Hugo Chavez seems to be resolved for now.

There was progress made in the direction of integration between all Latin American nations and for the creation of an independent South American community of nations and the possibility a South American parliament.

This is the first time since the Spanish invasion of the continent 500 years ago that any form of



Zapatista villagers. Solidarity between the radical movements of South America is growing

solidarity between South American nations has seemed so possible, as the many attempts at independence in the past were crushed often with the use of extreme violence and

repression.

Latin America has historically been sharply divided by ethnicity, the White or European descendants being pro-western and holding

the vast majority of the land and wealth; while the majority of the population, that is, the indigenous, negro, and mixed people live in a state of exclusion and poverty.

The elite, living in the pocket of their United States and European masters, enrich themselves on the backs of the majority by selling the independence of the continent for their own benefit, endorsing the destruction and rape of the land and its people.

Latin America, from Mexico to Chile, has always held vast and seemingly endless natural resources ripe for exploitation. Venezuela, for example, now has the largest proven deposits of oil outside the Middle East.

For centuries Europeans profited from the continent's gold, silver and its enormous natural riches; decimating and enslaving the indigenous civilisations and cultures who inhabited the lands. In more recent times the influence of the United States from the north strove to weaken, divide and control the rich lands of the south to feed its insatiable capitalist machine.

Now, after three decades of neoliberal policies and state repression, there is a change in the wind, a change for a united people independent from imperialism. The excluded are beginning to stir and stand up and their cry is inescapable: 'tierra y libertad'.

Like Mexico and Bolivia popular resistance in Latin America has taken on a momentum and dynamism of its own, from below and to the left, the people organised and capable of making their voices heard and making their leaders listen.

Scrap Trident: Welfare not Warfare

By Paul Carroll

Tony Blair has been accused of contravening international law by deciding to renew Britain's Trident nuclear weapons system at a cost of up to £25bn.

The number of warheads are to be cut from 200 to 160 over the next 30 years, however each warhead will have an explosive power of up to 100 kilotons, eight times the power of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 killing an estimated 140,000 people.

The international lawyer Philippe Sands, a member of the firm Matrix chambers co-founded by Cherie Blair, has produced a legal opinion for Greenpeace saying that the move would breach the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Dominick Jenkins, Greenpeace's disarmament campaigner has accused Blair of a double standards: 'While Tony Blair rattles his saber and waves treaties at foreigners, he's agitating for Britain to break those same treaties.'

'Building a new nuclear weapon is against international law and threatens to unravel the global non-proliferation system.'

There has been resistance to the renewal of Trident within Blair's Labour party: 53 Labour MPs signed a motion to scrap the renewal.

Blair has enough support, however, from the Conservative Party to avoid a Commons defeat on the matter in February.

Blair's argument for the renewal is that it is possible to 'imagine states sponsoring nuclear terrorism from their soil.'

'We know this global terrorism seeks chemical, biological and nuclear devices. It is not impossible to contemplate a rogue government helping such an acquisition.'

In other words, Blair is willing to threaten such 'rogue governments' with the prospect of being the targets of Trident.

Furthermore, as Gavin Strang, a former Labour Cabinet minister pointed out, replacing Trident weakens the case for international non-proliferation. Ironically, the greater the nuclear arms race, the greater prospect of such weapons becoming available to groups like Al-Qaida.

At the Trident nuclear base at Faslane in Scotland a year round blockade of the base, called Faslane 365, has begun.

The protesters have the backing of 70% of Scottish people who want Trident scrapped and were joined on 8 January by a number of Scottish parliamentarians.

Colin Fox of the Scottish Socialist Party argued that Trident nuclear weapons were both illegal under international law and immoral.

He proposed to the Scottish Parliament that the £25 billion needed to replace Trident would be better spent on health, education and social services.

Tony Blair's decision to renew Trident is yet another example of how far he has come from his maiden speech in the Commons in July 1983:

'I am a Socialist not through reading a textbook that has caught my intellectual fancy, nor through unthinking tradition, but because I believe that, at its best, Socialism corresponds most closely to an existence that is both rational and moral.'

'It stands for co-operation, not confrontation; for fellowship, not fear. It stands for equality, not because it wants people to be the same but because only through equality in our economic circumstances can our individuality develop properly.'

His evolution from pacifist into one of the world's foremost warmongers is both a personal capitulation to imperialism and one of the strongest arguments for the need to see a left alternative to Labour in the UK.

EU Big Business poverty for the

By Conor Kostick

Big business has an insatiable desire to exploit markets in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific: the ACP countries.

From the 1990s onwards the slogan through which they voiced this desire has been that of 'free trade' and from 1995 their main instrument has been the World Trade Organisation.

But, largely thanks to the huge international mobilisations against the WTO, that body has been stricken by paralysis.

'Free trade' is all very well if you are a massive multinational with very advanced productive equipment and a global reach for the most efficient acquisition of raw materials, labour and capital.

If you are a small enterprise in a developing nation, 'free trade' is a slogan that spells disaster, for it means bankruptcy at the hands of the multi-nationals.

The propagandists for the multi-nationals, economists in colleges and executives in organisations like the WTO, argue that economic survival of the fittest is in the best interests of developing nations in the long run, as the consumer obtains more choice and more efficiently made products. They are hypocrites.

Where the factories of Western business have been overtaken by new developments in countries like China and India, Western governments have retained tariff barriers to prevent, for example, their being ruined by the arrival of cheaper textiles.

Similarly, great subsidies are still given to agriculture in the West, which allows the huge agricultural companies to sell produce on the world market at low prices that undercut developing economies.

Large 'special duties' and quotas defend the European market internally from imports.

A more subtle hypocrisy exists over intellectual property. Using the advantages of their laboratories, Western medical drugs companies and agricultural companies are racing to claim patents on all sorts of plants and medicinal compounds that have been commonly available for centuries.

Their agenda is then to force developing countries to stop using these plants on the grounds that to do so breaches copyright.

The restless search of multi-nationals to implant themselves in new markets has led them to open up a new line of attack.

With the WTO discredited and finding it difficult to implement the international policies of big

business, regional and bi-lateral negotiations are under way to the same end.

In Europe this takes the form of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

For the past two years negotiations have been underway between European governments, including Ireland, and the 77 countries that were former European colonies. EPAs are defined as 'new WTO-compatible trading arrangements removing progressively barriers of trade between EU and ACP countries.'

Issues have been introduced into EPA negotiations that have been blocked in the WTO by developing nations. For instance, the four Singapore issues: Investment, Competition Policy, Transparency in Government Procurement and Trade Facilitation.

The EU is pressing for a free trade agreement that will open up the 750million strong market of these countries to the multinationals by 1 January 2008.

No recognition is being given to the inequality of situation, inequalities largely created by the impact of the former era of imperialism.

Should these EPAs be implemented, millions of jobs would be under threat in the former colonies along with entire industries.

The EU is demanding negotiations in the field of investment, competition, trade facilitation, government procurement, data protection and services.

The Fishing Industry provides

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a good example of the injustice of EU demands.

Allowing the EU fishing fleets into, say, Ugandan waters,

will lead to the ruin of the local fishing trade and a rapid reduction of fish stocks. To allow, in return, Ugandan fleets to operate



Less EPAs spell the Third World



Graphic: Tim Sanders

in EU waters is meaningless as the African country has no serious capacity to do so.

Several impact studies carried

out in a number of ACP studies show that the overall effect of EPAs will be to increase poverty. Mamadou Diop, a minister in

Senegal's government has stated that the relationships created by agreements like the EPAs will widen the gap between his country and the EU and wipe out the limited development Senegal has achieved.

One of the reasons why the former colonies cannot easily defy the EU on EPAs, although this is a distinct possibility, is their dependency on Western aid. In Uganda, for example, 30% of government expenditure comes from grant aid.

The huge upsurge of concern in the West to 'make poverty history' in 2005 culminated in 'Live 8' on 2 July, two and half million people wearing white bands and the 225,000 strong lobby of the G8 summit. At the end of this effort the newspapers pronounced 'victory for millions.'

Remember Bob Geldof's proud statement?

'There are no equivocations. Africa and the poor of that continent have got more from the last three days than they have ever got at any previous summit.'

'On aid, ten out of ten. On debt, eight out of ten.'

'On trade it is quite clear that this summit, uniquely, decided that enforced liberalisation must no longer take place.'

'That is a serious, excellent result on trade.'

Those, like Socialist Worker, who looked more critically at what the G8 had actually decided upon, were accused by Tony Blair of 'not getting their hands dirty by trying to achieve anything.'

The development of EPAs exposes the fact that the desire of millions to challenge poverty and economic injustice in 2005 was played with by the leaders of the Western world.

They successfully manoeuvred to appear to offer change, while the full ferocity of their agenda was saved for committee meetings to which the mass of the population were not invited: the EPA talks.

The Irish government is as much an enemy of the mass movement to end poverty as any other Western government. Although they make much of their promise that Ireland will reach the UN Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending target of 0.7% of GNP by 2012, a blind and uncritical approach to EPAs means that Ireland will be complicit in creating far more poverty in APC countries than they will have alleviated.

When Green TD Eamon Ryan asked Conor Lenihan TD, Minister of State for Irish Aid about the Government's position on EPAs, he was told: 'the EPAs are first and foremost instruments for development that will foster the smooth and gradual integration of ACP states into the world economy.'

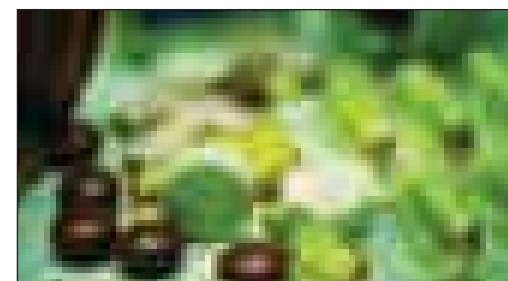
It will be necessary to challenge shameless lies like these through the same kinds of movements and alliances that successfully weakened the WTO.

Further reading

For detailed case studies see <http://www.seatini.org/>.

For campaigning information see <http://www.stopepa.org/>

Cheap medicine for all



By Dr. Juliet Bressan

One of the reasons that new remedies for disease cost so much is that big pharmaceutical companies have patent rights over a new drug as soon as it gets to the market.

In order to develop and research a new medicine, millions have to be spent conducting trials on patients, both in and out of hospitals, and the pharmaceutical giants spend billions advertising and promoting their new drugs once they have them out on the market.

Roche pharmaceuticals, for example, claims that it costs around 550 million pounds sterling to research and develop one single new medicine. The pharma industry puts all its energy into maximising the profit on this 550 million over and over again, for as long as the drug patent lasts.

Once a drug's patent has run out, it is possible to copy and reproduce generic versions of the medicine, and so this is why after extensive legal battles, generic versions of Aids remedies have become available in developing countries.

But in India, for example, the manufacturing laws changed in 2006 so that in the future it may not be possible to recreate generic drugs based on patented products as quickly any more.

Scientists now need to develop ways of working around these laws that are currently protecting industry at the expense of patient care.

DNDi (Drugs For Neglected Diseases Initiative) was founded in 2003 as a result of an initiative by Medicines Sans Frontieres (doctors without borders), the World Health Organisation and other public sector players.

DNDi exists to identify gaps in the research, development and production of essential drugs for diseases in developing countries, which big pharma would otherwise leave behind.

Their mission is to develop ideas for the affordable manufacture of drugs which are so expensive as a result of production costs and profit seeking, that developing nation governments are unwilling to fund them.

The DNDi have identified three major 'gaps' in the process of researching and producing new drugs that means that developing countries

don't have access to good medicine.

They have found that for diseases which are specific to developing nations, although pharma basic research is published, preclinical research (in the lab) is not considered to be worthwhile by the pharma industry, so nobody will do the necessary tests to make sure that the medicine is safe.

The second is that validated drugs don't enter the clinical trial stage because of profit-based company choices.

And the third is that drugs never reach the patients even after they have been researched and developed, because of registration problems (local licensing issues).

All of this means that scientists linked to DNDi are now working out new ways of bypassing these gaps in the chain of drug development and patient uptake.

Last week, two professors in London School of Pharmacy and Imperial College London announced their own contribution to health in developing nations which is to reformulate drugs which are currently still under patent into a slightly different molecule, and so bypass patent rights.

The London scientists are currently developing an almost-copy of a virus-killing drug that treats Hepatitis C, a fatal disease that is endemic in the Indian Subcontinent.

The Indian government will subsidise the research and trials, once the drug has been formulated, and so it can be manufactured as a completely new product, even while the original is still under patent.

The almost-copy drug is, in fact, the same drug copied, but bound biochemically to a long chain of sugar, or fat, which is absorbed into the body carrying the drug with it.

But the clever molecular "packaging" gives the drug a whole new biochemical structure and it is therefore legal to manufacture it, even under the existing patent law.

The professors (Shaunak and Brocchini) are also developing a new fat-carried molecule of a copy of a drug which they hope will be a cure for Kala-azar disease, a fly-borne tropical killer disease of South America, East Africa and the Indian Subcontinent.



The Pope's Children: The View from Dalkey

By Kieran Allen

Pangloss is a character in Voltaire's novel *Candide* who became associated with the phrase 'we are living in the best of all possible worlds'. In a modern Irish version, he would be modelled on David McWilliams, the author of *The Pope's Children*.

Unlike Voltaire, McWilliams does not adopt a dry philosophising tone but writes as if he was on speed: racy, funny and highly perceptive on many points.

He writes of the bread-roll breakfast; the growth of Woodies; the fact that nearly six out of ten people who live in Athlone commute; the crazy upper class rituals about getting into golf clubs: all to show that modern Ireland is a 'full on' society.

Like a pop sociologist, he segments the population into Dulchies (Dubliners living in Tullamore and other remote parts); Decklanders (DIY fanatics who want US style garden patios) and a new elite called HiCos or Hibernian-Cosmopolitans who have outgrown the church-state conflicts to combine benefits of globalisation with a Riverdance culture and hot house Gaelscoilciana.

But behind McWilliams' fast, sex-obsessed humour, there are a number of central propositions. Like many ideologues, he paints the world as if it had been moulded in the image of his own social class. It is a view of the Pope's Children from Dalkey Hill.

McWilliams' main argument is that a great blurring has occurred between the social classes and 'we are now a middle class nation'. Everybody has moved up and only a gloomy 'Commentariat' question this achievement.

As evidence, he offers an immense detail of selected impressions. The most bizarre must surely be his claim for an outbreak of 'lawnmower envy', which he first spotted in the big gardens around his father's house.

You would think that the vast old working class estates of Crumlin or Togher had just disappeared. Or that McWilliams had never visited the many new apartment complexes thrown up by shoddy developers or the gleaming deserts of housing estates like Tyrellstown in west Dublin.

Aside from short references to construction workers and newspaper van drivers, workers hardly figure in McWilliams' world. In one highly revealing table about the winners and losers in the Celtic Tiger, he contrasts media people and artists to the old 'Respectariat' of teachers and civil servants. It is as if he never even thought of bus drivers; factory workers, cleaners and everyone else.

The only hard evidence McWilliams offers for the 'middle class nation' is a short reference to the 2002 census that divides the population up into seven social classes.

He claims that half the country is in the top three social classes and by adding on the 18 percent of unclassified new occupations, he comes out with a figure of 65 percent of the population who are middle class.

There are two problems with this procedure: one, the statistical trick played by the Central Statistics Office and, second, a particular usage of the term middle class that is more common to American political discourse.

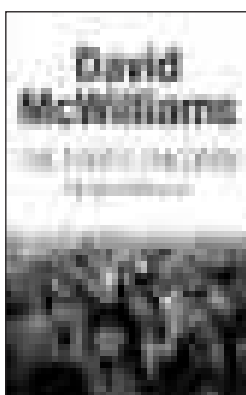
The first three of the seven social classes that the CSO use are Professional Workers, Managerial and Technical, and Non-Manual and together they claim that these form 49 percent of population.

But the Managerial and Technical Group, which is supposed to comprise 26 percent, includes such unlikely members of the bourgeoisie as petrol pump attendants; check-out operators; sales assistants; nurses' aids; ambulance staff!

A subsequent CSO study showed that one third of this apparent upper class are union members: precisely the proportion for the labour force as a whole!

The problem is that the CSO agglomerates different categories of people to play down the reality of social class in Ireland.

A wider problem lies in McWilliams



prevalent usage of the American meaning of the term middle class. In US political discourse, there is supposed to be no working class bar the most poverty stricken members of society. So, rather bizarrely to European ears, you hear about the plight of a 'middle class' that cannot afford health cover or needs to do two jobs to survive.

The term 'middle class' itself rests on a massive confusion. It originally arose at the time of the French Revolution to denote a social class that stood between the aristocracy and the poor. But today is mainly used in a confused fashion to describe anyone who does not work in a factory.

McWilliams compounds this problem by not looking at how the supposed middle class in Ireland actually have to work. He glibly talks about how white collar workers are splashing out on wine and new age therapies but ignores how their jobs rest on a new regime of insecurity whereby they are constantly monitored for performance and outputs.

He ignores how the old 'middle class' culture of trust which defined a relationship between upper white collar employees such as bank officials and their managers has been replaced by an audit culture where everything is measured.

To put it in more technical terms, most of the jobs that McWilliams refers to as 'middle class' have been subjected to increased work intensity as manual jobs. In other words, most have been proletarianised.

They are also not particularly highly paid. The latest EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions shows that six of the top deciles (slots of one tenth of the population) have an income of less than €458.27 a week.

Of course, there has also been a growth of privileged layers in Irish soci-

ety. While not directly capitalists, they function as the hangers on of their social order. Into this category fit consultants; real managers; top accountants and so on. These might genuinely be termed a 'new middle class' and make up around of a fifth of Irish society.

McWilliams, however, thinks most of Irish society has come to resemble this grouping.

How, according to McWilliams, has the wondrous transformation of Ireland taken place? He advances two principle causes.

The first is that Ireland functions like an old style Venetian city state where it keeps cosy with both the US and Europe, although more with the US. According to McWilliams, Ireland benefits when Europe is weak and the US is strong because the Celtic Tiger has been a by-product of US hegemony. The lesson, he argues, is that we should facilitate the US at Shannon because 'anything else is bad for business. It is called being grown up.'

Aside from the fact that the French case shows that a surge in US investment is not linked to the immediate political stances of government on the Iraq war, there is a major problem with this argument.

City-states like Venice grew up in the crevices of feudalism where they offered unique opportunities for trade. The Celtic Tiger, by contrast, is only one of the many possible locations for US investment in Europe and there are already signs that that investment, at least in manufacturing, has begun to shift.

In addition US imperialism is facing defeat in Iraq and has growing problems with its debt addicted economy. Hoping, therefore that Ireland will remain an economic success story by hitching itself to the star of US hegemony might therefore be a little short sighted.

McWilliams other explanation for

Ireland's success story is the credit revolution. Entry to the Euro, he claims, meant that younger Irish people got access to the savings of older German folk and this oiled the economy.

Credit has certainly helped to fuel the property boom, with house prices rising by 300 percent in ten years. But it is doubtful if this alone created a boom, or can maintain one.

The Celtic Tiger arose out of unique circumstances in the nineties when US capitalism was riding high and needed a manufacturing base inside the EU. The particular Irish miracle that arose from that flow of investment ended around 2001 and has mainly been fuelled by debt induced domestic spending since then.

Ireland resembles the Japanese success story of the eighties rather than Venice in the 1500s. After years of a genuine growth in manufacturing capacity, Japan switched to a bubble economy to prolong the boom. A huge growth of banking was founded on inflated assets in property. The Japanese miracle continued somewhat longer on hype but when the crash came it was much harder. For most the nineties, Japan experienced negative growth or recession.

Today the rumblings of the Irish earthquake have started to grow. In a major report Deutsche Bank has warned that Ireland faces the strongest risk of a property crash; a crash which co-incidentally has already started in the US property market. If that happens the consequences will be devastating as everything from government revenue to the composition to the labour is artificially weighted towards property.

McWilliams' hype on the Pope's Children should be retained as an amusing relic, just like Pangloss soothing balm tried to cover the Lisbon earthquake.

YOUR THOUGHTS ON...

Saddam's hanging

No-one has the right

I am totally and utterly opposed to the death penalty. I believe that it is a basic principle that no person, institution or state has the right to take another person's life. This is a basic principle which capital punishment violates.

Furthermore, this principle cannot be held accountable to or quantified by numbers. The fact that Saddam Hussein murdered up to ten thousand of his own people in Kurdistan, does not make him any different from someone who murders a single person.

They both break an un-bendable principle. It is hypocritical for a state to execute someone for taking the lives of others.

However more importantly to say that the execution of Saddam Hussein was justifiable because he murdered thousands is to say that it would have been less serious if he had murdered a single person, a single father, mother, son or daughter.

The taking of someone's life is wrong and to say that Saddam Hussein was worse than any other murderer because of the numbers involved is to make a mockery of a basic principle.

Rather than looking at the big picture with the number 10,000 written on a page, I believe that one should try to look at in on the level of the individual.

For the children who lost a parent in Kurdistan would not have grieved for a number on a page or a statistic but rather for the fact that someone close and irreplaceable to them was gone.

The loss of someone close is a horrible experience. That someone should have the right to inflict that loss on someone else is unjustifiable, and it cannot be labelled just when figures are applied.

This is like the much quoted topic of the worst dictator in history. Some say it was Hitler with six to fourteen million murdered, some say it was Stalin with up to thirty million while last year Mao was announced as the dictator to eclipse all dictators with his murder of seventy million people.

This gruesome act of comparing and trying to quantify mass murders is almost like saying that Hitler was not as bad as Mao because he killed fifty million less.

That is to forget that Mao did not commit one horrible act by murdering seventy million, but rather he committed seventy million horrible acts.

However, the events surrounding the hasty execution of the Iraqi dictator also showed a worrying development. Because the execution was carried out in a hasty and brutal manner with video footage even shown of the act, and because the war in Iraq is so un-popular, there has been a slight attempt to polarise the issue as if Saddam's

opposition to the invading armies in some way redeems him from his actions.

I was watching The Friday Night Project on Channel 4 recently. They have a feature called the 'What's Hot and What's Not Barometer'. The presenter proceeded to produce a picture of Saddam Hussein.

Before he had placed the picture in the hot or not section (it went of course in the not section) the audience started to clap for the picture of the fallen dictator. Just because the those who executed Saddam were as wrong as he was for murdering his own people, does not mean for one moment that he should be relieved in any way for his acts.

The act of murder, whether it is labelled murder, execution, assassination or even genocide and I think it is hugely important that we should never forget it.

Eoin Martin, Dublin

Who will benefit?

Saddam Hussein's execution was like reaching the end of a Hollywood script. It was the ending everybody was expecting, a sentence written before the trial began.

Some of the Western media spectacularized the grim event. The Sun had already distributed the 'Saddam hanging kit'; but it is the zeitgeist.

If the trial and execution illustrated the new Iraqi course, the road to democracy is very long.

Amnesty International expressed serious concerns about the unfair and irregular trial proceedings. They were biased by political interference, which did not allow International Law guidelines to be followed. The road to democracy should restore such basic rights, those that were missing during the dictator's regime.

In reality, who will benefit from Saddam's execution?

Remember, the sentence was imposed for only one of Saddam's crimes. Left alive, he would be too dangerous. During a fair trial, expanding documentation into Saddam's past would testify to US-UK collusions with his regime, including crimes against humanity.

Will Bush or Blair ever be tried for their war crimes?

By killing Saddam Hussein the Bush administration hopes to recover ground now that public opinion firmly condemns the illegal USUK invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The 'righteous' American warlords rejoice at the killing of a human being, no need remarking how wicked he was. Those same warlords claim their right to export their brand of democracy worldwide.

It is unacceptable that in the third millennium, in a supposed democracy, people still receive death sentences.

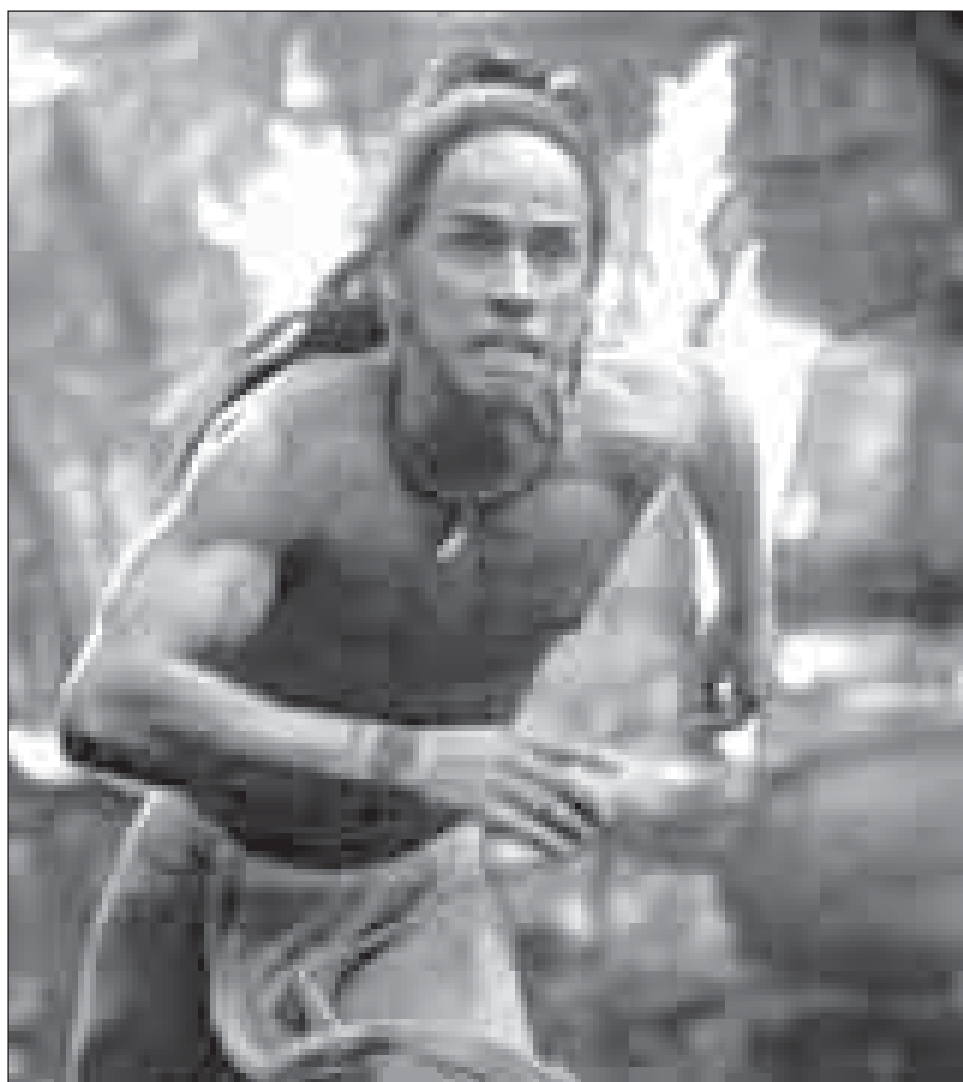
The execution shows how peace and democracy are still way out of reach.

Luca Valentini, Galway

DO YOU HAVE A COMMENT TO MAKE ON RECENT EVENTS? SEND IT TO EDITOR@SWP.IE

REVIEWS

The Fall of a Civilisation



The violence is graphic, much blood is spilled

By Sara O'Rourke

Apocalypto opens with a quote on the big screen: 'a great civilisation is not conquered from without until it destroys itself from within.'

Directed, co-produced and co-scripted by Mel Gibson, it was filmed almost entirely in Mexico it uses a cast of Native American, Mexican, Guatemalan and other non-professional actors from around Latin America.

As in The Passion of Christ (2004) which was filmed in Aramaic and Latin, this latest Mel Gibson project was filmed in a Mayan dialect, Yucatan

Mexican.

Set in the sixteenth century in a lush, green, dark jungle, it is a tale of survival, of a dramatic pursuit through the jungle for what seems like days and days.

Early on a sleeping village is attacked and brutalised by savage warriors.

Those left alive are tied and bound and carried off on a journey to the big Mayan city.

The hero of the tale Jaguar Paw (Rudy Youngblood) manages to hide his family down a well before being hauled away.

While mostly gripping and suspense-filled viewing, the

scenes when our forest slaves arrive at the big city are unexpected, fanciful and even fantastical.

The scenes at the great Mayan temple seem to belong to a sci-fi 'Night of the Living Dead'-type world rather than an ancient people worshipping their gods.

The wailing, swaying, clucking and clawing invokes images of modern drug-induced end-of-festival-type mania.

It is worth noting that while hundreds of sacrificial slaves are beheaded and their heads thrown down the steps of the pyramid-like temple, bounc-

ing into the insanely cheering crowds, the ruler, his pampered wife and over-weight, chubby, son look on gleefully. The road into the city had been lined by emaciated, obviously starving, desperate citizens, crazed from hunger. The spilling of blood is how the well-fed rulers and their priests keep the population in fear of the gods and from turning their anger towards their over-fed rulers.

Without giving too much of the story away, Jaguar Paw does manage to escape but incurs the wrath of the slave-catchers who follow him back into the jungle for a high-speed chase that must have been one third of the entire film. Running at break-neck speed Jaguar Paw refuses to give up and just keeps running.

There have been the whole range of reactions to this film, Anthropologists have spoken out in surprising numbers about the flaws, mainly that the human sacrifice element is hugely exaggerated.

In Guatemala there has been outrage among the descendants of the Mayans for portraying the idea that this supposed savage society would have destroyed itself anyway and the arrival of Cortes and the Spanish was just incidental.

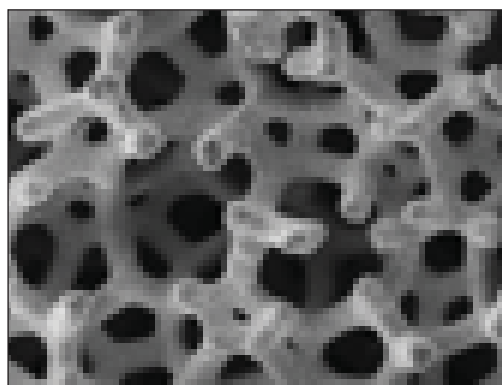
Critics on the right are defending this type of argument claiming that the barbarity is no different to the so-called barbarous insurgents the Americans found when they arrived in Baghdad.

The violence is graphic, much blood is spilled, many heads literally roll and some have said the film is lost in the pure carnage.

Another interpretation may be that it shows the brutality and indiscriminate cruelty of war when even women and children are killed. Perhaps it is a lesson in what happens when a people are invaded and their lands occupied.

Apocalypto, 15 A cert, 137 minutes, Directed by Mel Gibson. Starring Rudy Youngblood, Dalia Hernandez, Jonathan Brewer, Raoul Trujillo, Gerardo Taracena

Have you the embryo of a good play?



Stem cells

Advances in technology are creating all sorts of ethical issues.

Should embryos be destroyed as a result of stem cell research?

Can the state be trusted with a DNA database of its inhabitants? Should there be a market for

organ transplants?

If testing shows an IVF embryo to have severe genetic defects, should it not be transplanted into the mother's womb?

Although Ireland has made enormous strides towards a modern, secular, society, the Catholic

Church still holds considerable authority, one that means that answers to these questions are far more likely to be conservative ones than elsewhere in Europe.

A new playwriting competition will be of interest to readers of Socialist Worker.

The Irish Council for Bioethics are offering a package worth €11,000 and the opportunity to work with Fishamble Theatre company for a winning submission.

Entrants will be asked to submit a synopsis of a script and a written statement outlining the specific manner in which the play relates to the field of bioethics and how the author envisages

the development of the script.

The winner will be selected from a shortlist following interview.

See <http://www.bioethics.ie/events/index.html> or ring the Council on +353 1 6380920 for further details.

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Winter 2006



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DUN LAOGHAIRE

Privatisation of bin collection begins



By Richard Boyd Barrett
People Before Profit Alliance
candidate in Dun Laoghaire

A private waste collection company called Panda has been given a permit by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Co. Council to offer a household bin collection service in the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown area.

In brochures that have been distributed across the county, Panda are offering to collect bins at a price twenty per cent cheaper than that charged by the Council.

A small number of households have already begun to switch to the private operator.

The public should not be fooled by this gimmick.

Across the country where private waste companies have moved in on the household bin collection service, they have started out by offering lower charges than the council. Once they drive the Council bin service out of business, however, the charges

rise rapidly.

Bin collection has now been privatised in most counties in Ireland but bin charges in these counties are much higher than in Dublin where the service remains in Council hands.

A number of years ago, private operators, Noble Waste, began a household bin collection service in Bray and offered cheaper collection charges than the Council.

Within a couple of years, the Council bin service was closed down. With the Council service gone, the private operators (now Greenstar) began to rapidly increase charges.

In 2006, Greenstar in Wicklow were charging €453 per year for the household collection service. For those on a tag a bag service, tags now cost €10 each. Private waste operators in Wicklow are now also charging €5 for each recycling collection (green bin collection). So much for encouraging people to recycle!

In Waterford, where bin collection has also been privatised, householders are paying over €480 per year for the service.

The Council's plan all along was to privatise the bin service. By introducing bin taxes, they paved the way for the privatisation of the whole service.

The Council claimed bin charges were to encourage recycling, yet they never seriously invested in a recycling infrastructure. Panda are offering to take plastics in their green bins but the council green bin service operated by Oxigen, will not take them. How is it that a private compa-



Privatised waste collection across Dublin on the way?

ny can recycle plastics in its first year of operation but five years after the council introduced bin charges they have failed to do so? The answer is, that the Council has never been serious about recycling, their goal was privatisation.

The importance of this issue is not limited to bins. If the council and government succeed in privatising bin collection, charges and privatisation for water will follow quickly.

Within a very short space of time

householders will be paying well over €1000 per year for local services unless we fight the privatisation agenda now.

The best way to resist these unfair bin charges is simply refuse to pay altogether. The reason bin charges are still lower in Dublin than elsewhere in the country is because tens of thousands of people have refused to pay.

Everyone is entitled to vital public services such as waste collection

and water. These should be paid for from a fair central taxation system that is based on income and ability to pay. Vital public services should not be available only to those that can afford them.

Unless we want to be paying well over €1000 per year for waste and water services we need to make the bin tax a major election issue. We need to elect anti-bin tax candidates across Dublin and keep up the campaign of mass non-payment.

DUBLIN SOUTH CENTRAL

Bin Tax Campaign back on the streets



Anti Bin Tax campaigners protest outside Davitt Road depot

Recent moves by Dublin City Council litter wardens to issue fines to residents around Drimnagh for their weekly protests outside Davitt Road Depot have failed to deter the campaign.

On the first Saturday of the New Year over fifty local people turned out with their wheelie bins to protest against the double taxation of bin charges.

The Campaign Against the Bin Tax is particularly strong in the Dublin South Central constituency. Protests at the Drimnagh bin depot and the Ballyfermot Civic Centre have been held regularly since the council refused to collect bins of non-payers.

In the coming year the campaign will bring this issue high on the agenda for the elections. It is not just

the bin tax that people are concerned about but also water charges and other public service charges. There is now also a real threat to privatise the service. The campaign will be meeting with council workers in the coming weeks to maintain cooperation between the community and the workers and to further the case against privatisation of this public service.

BALLYFERMOT

Caring for our elderly citizens in Ballyfermot

A community complex for elderly and disabled people living in Rossville in Ballyfermot's Drumfinn area was faced with closure towards the end of 2006.

The complex had been staffed for years by volunteer workers from the community who themselves recently went into retirement.

The complex had provided between 35 and 37 vulnerable local people with hot meals at least twice a week. Its closure would have been a great loss to the community.

But in order to keep the service going Teresa MacGouran, a local community worker, and other local volunteers, have been cooking and providing meals to these people since October.

Now the Health Services Executive and the Dublin City Council are meeting with Teresa and other volunteers who want to see paid employees engaged by the state to look after



Brid Smith, People Before Profit Alliance
candidate in Dublin South Central

services for the elderly.

Brid Smith, candidate for People Before Profit in Ballyfermot, is one of the volunteers who has helped out with the project and she told Socialist Worker, 'There is a quiet battle taking place in our community all the time by decent local people who try their hardest to get proper funding and resources for the most needy in the area.'

'It would be a pittance to employ

people to provide these services. This is just another example of the Government putting people's needs way down in their order of priorities.'

Teresa McGouran told Socialist Worker, 'None of the politicians or parties even noticed what was happening here.'

'And it is about to happen again in Cornamona when the community hall there is knocked down.'

'Old people need the socialising that comes with getting together for meals and meeting up in their local halls.'

'We need paid employment in these services and not just the volunteers who are brilliant but our elderly citizens deserve better care and attention and we won't stop until we get the workers we need. 99% of services for the elderly are provided by volunteer labour and that is just not on especially in this so-called Celtic Tiger economy.'

Protest/Reports/Struggle

email to editor@swp.ie Phone 01 8722682

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

Protests at the Power City development in Sallynoggin



Sallynoggin residents protest at development plans

Photos: Hugh Lewis

Local residents and members of the People Before Profit Alliance held a demonstration on 21 December outside the premises of Power City in Sallynoggin to protest against plans for 3 and 4-storey apartment and retail complex on the Power City site.

People from the local area had previously indicated unanimous opposition to the planned development at a public meeting. Their concern is that the construction will cause massive disruption to the area while it is being built and that the plan is totally unsuitable for the area. The development is projected to bring construction works, traffic congestion, noise, CO2 and dust pollution to the heart of Sallynoggin for more than three years.

According to Richard Boyd Barrett of the People Before Profit Alliance: 'this development will bring enormous disruption, pollution and traffic chaos to the Sallynoggin area but will bring

no benefit whatsoever to the community. It is completely out of line with the character and needs of the area and is solely motivated by greed for profit. There is no way the Council should approve this development.'

A residents' association has been formed to sustain a long-term campaign against what might only be the thin end of the wedge in terms of developers targeting the area. The Power City development comes at the same time as the already approved plan for a major development at the Deerhunter site and the Cosgrave plan for a massive mostly exclusive development at Dun Laoghaire Golf Club. The Cosgrave plan, which has also seen enormous local opposition, includes an entrance through the same area of Sallynoggin, turning the area into a virtual motorway.

As James Fahey, chairperson of the newly established association, explained: 'the O'Rourke Park and Rollins Villas Residents

Association (ORRRRA) was recently formed to protect and improve our demising amenity and sense of community. With huge development already allowed on the Deerhunter Site and proposals for the €1.5 billion development of the Dun Laoghaire Golf Course, we have to unite and let County Hall know that we can't live in the shadows of these the massive developments.'

Furthermore, Richard Boyd Barrett pointed out that 'this area of Sallynoggin is zoned Neighbourhood Centre (NC) in the County development plan. It is completely unacceptable that a single private company concerned only with profit should determine the shape character and content of a neighbourhood centre.'

'In fact the Neighbourhood Centre does not allow for the kind of development power city are proposing. So there should be no question of the Council granting approving this plan.

'What most residents in Sallynoggin want is to see improved community and youth facilities and more public amenities not more private apartments and profit driven development.'

Geraldine Clarke, PRO for ORRRRA, added: 'access to the development will be through O'Rourke's Park, causing major traffic chaos for a quiet residential area. All children using the public paths will be in danger from construction traffic and traffic going into Power City.'

'Old folk will find it a major hazard just getting to the local shops and vital facilities such as the post office on Sallynoggin Road.'

'Pollution from the site will bring increased risks for people suffering from illnesses like Asthma, other lung conditions and heart problems.'

For more information on this campaign contact Richard Boyd Barrett 087-6329511

TARA



Stop the destruction of our heritage



Save Tara campaigners began the New Year with a protest to prevent preparatory tree felling along the route of the new M3 motorway.

The activists sat in front of machinery and in the buckets of earth-moving equipment, preventing them from being used.

Protestors are outraged that attempts are being made to proceed with this work even though contracts have yet to be signed and an oral hearing on a draft tolling scheme still has to be convened. See <http://www.tarawatch.org/>.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Your right to join a union

By John Kavanagh

This issue of Socialist Worker sees the launch of a regular advice column for trade unionists, written by a leading official.

Over the course of 2007 we will be covering the basics of workers' rights as well as answer any specific questions that readers might have..

All employees in the Republic of Ireland (regardless of their Nationality or their country of birth) have a constitutional right to join a trade union.

Being sacked or dismissed for joining

a trade union or for trade union activity is automatically unfair under the Unfair Dismissals Act.

A worker dismissed in such circumstances does not require any particular length of service in the job in order to be protected under the Act or to enforce his/her rights.

Where there is a dismissal for trade union membership or for trade union activity, the employee may refer the matter either to a Rights Commissioner or to the Employment Appeals Tribunal.

In such circumstances it is advisable that a full-time official of the trade union

take the case on behalf of the member.

It should be noted, however, that an employer has no legal obligation to negotiate with a union on behalf of an employee who is a member of a trade union unless previously agreed.

This does not prevent a dispute about trade union recognition from being a lawful trade dispute.

In Northern Ireland the law is similar but slightly different, in that employees have the right to join a trade union of their choice.

Their employer may not dismiss them, select them for redundancy or make them suffer a detriment for being or

proposing to become a union member, nor for taking part in the union's activities at an appropriate time.

Dismissals that infringe these rights may be taken to an Employment Tribunal regardless of the employee's length of service.

Employees who claim to have been unfairly dismissed in this way (except those complaining of unfair selection for redundancy) can also apply to the Tribunal for an order of interim relief (which requires the employer to continue their contract of employment or to re-employ them pending the final outcome of the

case).

There is, however, a mechanism and procedure available to trade unions in Northern Ireland to force compulsory recognition on employers (too detailed to explain here) but no such mechanism exists in the Republic of Ireland.

In reality what this means is that all employees North and South have the right to join a union, but there is no obligation on the employer to negotiate with that union for the purposes of collective bargaining and therefore it comes down to being a numbers game.

If an individual joins a trade union and the

employer refuses to recognise that union there is not much the individual can do to force the employer to recognise the union, although the individual can remain a trade union member.

If, however, a majority or even a large minority of workers in a workplace join a union the employer cannot ignore that fact for long and will be forced to recognise the union (compulsory recognition in the case of Northern Ireland) or face an industrial dispute or confrontation.

Working people need strong unions to improve and protect basic legal rights at work.

Having rights on paper is one thing; actually exercising them and benefiting from them is something else.

Workers have a far better chance of knowing about their rights and getting their entitlements when they are organised in a trade union.

It is well proven that employees have a much better chance of securing improvements on legal entitlements when they are members of and organised in trade unions.

All workers on the island of Ireland have the right to join a union and not to be dismissed or victimised for joining a union: what are you waiting for?

Got an industrial relations question for John Kavanagh? Send it to editor@swp.ie

Socialist Worker

NON-PAYMENT CAN BEAT THE TAP TAX

Trade Unions and Community groups step up campaign

The anger people feel towards government plans to introduce water charges really took off in December.

Stalls in Belfast during the lead up to Christmas and New Year saw people signing a non-payment cheque addressed to Peter Hain for £0.00 at the rate of 150 people per hour.

Thousands of Communities Against Water Tax (CAWT) window stickers for the car or house were picked up and many people joined the campaign.

With around ten weeks to go to the introduction of the bills the government has lost the central arguments it has made for the introduction of the water charges.

Most people know we already pay for water through our regional rates and so are opposed to paying again.

Even when the government tries to wriggle around this central question by suggesting that they need money for the upgrade of a service in desper-

ate need of repair, it is common knowledge that Gordon Brown can find billions for consultants, or the war in Iraq, so why not £150 million a year to ensure that the water we get through our taps is clean and safe to drink.

After a few leaked emails saying that the government wanted to increase the speed of privatisation, there are few who don't realise that privatisation of the water service is their real intention.

Most people understand that a privatised service will not be more efficient and will not provide investment for infrastructure or a better service.

There is also a general recognition that the government could be defeated by a campaign of mass non-payment, in the same way that the non-payment of the Poll Tax defeated the Thatcher government.

The government's concern is increasingly obvious. In December, government

ministers used a report which showed that the water quality in Northern Ireland was poor compared with that in England and Wales to plead for acceptance of water charges.

The difference, less than half of one percent, and no mention of the fact that water quality can easily be maintained and improved without privatisation, as it has been in a number of European countries.

This came on top of a series of 'own goals' in November, the worst of which was the leaking of a document that outlined how water charges were going to be collected.

In a display of the contempt towards people experiencing poverty in Northern Ireland, those living in less well off areas were given the title 'rock bottom'; while other areas were populated by 'affluent achievers.'

It was planned that in the less well off areas the debt collectors would come to the door within

a few weeks of failure to pay the bill, unlike better-off areas where it was proposed that people get a lot longer to pay.

The signs are that a mass non-payment campaign will be successful. But there are still a number of arguments that need to be made clearer.

While most people agree with non-payment, some think that metering is a good option. The campaign has to convince people that metering is simply another way of forcing through privatisation.

Many pensioners have been lead to believe that they have to have meters. They don't and they shouldn't have to pay twice either.

Does it matter that the campaign lacks support among the major parties?

The Poll Tax was defeated by non-payment without the support of Labour. Furthermore, it is highly significant that in fighting the water tax, campaigners have the support of the

Trade Union movement.

The Trade Unions have the numbers, the infrastructure and the organisation to play an important role in the campaign. Every one of the 650,000 households in Northern Ireland will soon receive a leaflet from the Trade Union movement explaining the facts about non-payment; that it isn't a criminal offence; that if we build the campaign we can get enough support that will force the government to back off.

With the combined weight of the Trade Unions and campaigning groups in every community there are real possibilities that a campaign could be forged with sufficient numbers to win.

Victory on this issue would be a major boost for working class unity in Northern Ireland, as the campaign is a non-sectarian one.

It would also put a huge dent in the agenda, set in motion by Peter Hain, to privatise the entire public sector.

