

Recession threat:

NO TO PAY A FREEZE FIGHT THE JOB CUTS



By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

BERTIE AHERN'S claim that Ireland can weather the coming recession is a lie.

The IMF warned about the vulnerability of the Irish economy to the kind of US downturn now under way - a 1 per cent drop in US growth translates into a 1.75 per cent drop in Ireland. Ireland is the most globalised economy in the world and is more exposed to turmoil in financial markets than any other country.

The question is who will pay for the economic downturn, bosses or workers? Ahern and Cowan want workers to passively accept the downturn in the economy.

The recent spate of job cuts and fac-

tory closures across Ireland meant over 1000 redundancies since the new year and 15,000 more people on the live register than this time last year.

360 jobs are to go in Allergen, Arklow, because the company wants to move production to Costa Rica where it can pay €8 a day. Allergen had a loyal workforce that didn't strike and gave lots of productivity in pay deals. But still they were dumped by the company. Irish Ferries in a re-run of three years ago want to employ workers on 4 and hour on their ferries.

Many of Ireland's bosses think that the unions have been sufficiently weakened that they can push through lower wages and longer working hours. Under the mantra of competitiveness they want to cut pay and attack working conditions.

This will come to a head in the new round of national pay talks.

Ireland's rich made a killing during the Celtic Tiger. There are now 6 billionaires and over 100 multi-millionaires in Ireland. Many of the super-rich claim to be living abroad to avoid paying taxes.

In contrast the pay rises workers got under the last national pay deal did not even cover price rises.

Public sector workers, and nurses in particular, have been betrayed by a benchmarking body that gave zero increases. And now the new pay talks are beginning the government is suggesting workers should not expect anything.

Employment in the construction industry, which accounts for 15% of the Irish workforce, is down 4.5%.

Economists are now predicting a 6% general unemployment rate by the end of the year.

Ahern, having secured himself and other top ministers, judges and civil servants enormous pay rises (only deferred for a year), wants workers to carry the burden of the recession through job losses and pay cuts.

Ireland's rich and the multinationals aren't facing any clawbacks from the government. In fact governments across the planet are using public finances to bail out private banks like Northern Rock in Britain that gambled massively on the latest stock market bubble in property.

Workers should get the same treatment. If governments can intervene to save banks they can intervene to save

jobs.

The Government should use public finances to fund a programme of essential infrastructure building, like schools and public housing, to bridge the gap in employment in the construction industry. We should not let employers divide us by agency work or by racism against recent immigrants to Ireland.

Where factories are closed workers should occupy to save the jobs or at least win good redundancy packages and re-skilling courses from employers who have made massive profits in the last 10 years.

When papers like the Financial Times talk about the biggest recession since the 1930s its time for our unions to walk away from Social Partnership and start fighting to defend every job.



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Protest at the jailing of human rights activists in Malaysia



On Monday 28th January, demonstrators gathered at the Malaysian embassy to protest at the recent jailing of human rights activists in that country. The Malaysian government has used the Internal Security Act to attack lawyers who want the right to Freedom of Assembly. For further information contact Friends Of Human Rights Activists In Malaysia: Declan Kavanagh - 085-7318496 declankavanagh62@hotmail.com & Kulwant Gill 087 7836057 - kulwantgill@eircom.net

Glenavy residents smell a rat

By local resident RYAN MCKINNEY

FIVE HUNDRED concerned residents crammed into a recent meeting organised in Glenavy against plans by Rose Energy (a consortium of three major players in the agri-food industry) to build a huge incinerator on the shores of Lough Neagh outside the village.

Rose Energy claim to be building a sustainable energy plant which will convert agricultural biomass (poultry litter) into electricity; however local people fear that the project isn't as green as is claimed.

The meeting heard contributions from local people who have endured twelve years of odious emissions from an existing bone meal incinerator run by Glenfarm Holdings which will be next door to the proposed plant. Present also were activists who successfully opposed plans for a similar incinerator in Tyrone.

Local political representatives took the opportunity to reassure those present that they too were concerned about the proposals but the best contributions were from local people including a poultry farmer who has been trying to persuade the assembly to fund an alternative method of disposing chicken litter without damaging the environment even further.

Rose Energy claim the incinerator, which will burn 250,000 tonnes of waste per year, will not result in an increase in pollution or any significant increase in traffic or odours.

However the non-profit Energy Justice Network describes emissions from poultry litter as "roughly as polluting as coal" emitting NOx, SO2, CO, PM (particulate matter, or soot), hydrochloric acid, antimony, manganese, mercury as well as dioxins and furans.

Emissions of these types are linked to a range of respiratory health prob-

lems, increases in infant mortality rates, increases in low birth weight, heart disease, reproductive disorders and cancer.

Once incineration takes place, these substances go into the atmosphere and spread wherever the wind blows—right across the north and further afield. Rose Energy also claimed that only 15 lorries a day would use the plant however research would appear to show that it will be more like 50 and all this in an area classified as of High Scenic Value and scientifically important.

A committee was formed at the meeting and it will be crucial now to argue for a strategy which involves the mass of people living in the area and not get sidetracked into costly legal battles.

Politicians who were present backed calls for a public enquiry but at this stage Lisburn City Council haven't backed the planning application there-

fore we need to make sure that the planning consent is refused.

We can do that by organising to hold a mass protest when the Council's planning committee meets again.

The local UUP councillor claimed to be 'open-minded' about the proposals, yet on his website Mid Ulster UUP MLA Billy Armstrong has this to say "the Private Sector has come forward with a solution.

Government must not be seen to let red tape, bureaucracy or inter-departmental turf wars cause this opportunity to be lost."

This clearly shows that we cannot rely on our local politicians to tell Rose Energy where to go.

People Before Profit will be working with the campaign to ensure that we do just that and stick to the campaign slogan of 'Not Here, Not Anywhere!'

For more info log on to <http://www.glenavy.com/> or <http://www.roselimitedenergy.com/>

Government fails Autistic children

By PEADAR O'GRADY

PARENTS OF a seven-year-old boy with autism face hundreds of thousands of Euro in legal costs when the High Court ordered them to pay all their own costs in an action against the Department of Education.

Seán's parents wanted him to have a one-to-one programme known as Applied Behavioural Analysis ('ABA'). Children with Autism require early detection of their condition and

an early, intensive intervention, including home and preschool planned educational programmes, focusing on language, coordination and social skills so that they can take part in everyday activities without distress.

Intensive programmes require trained preschool childcare staff, Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), Occupational Therapists (OTs), Social Workers, Psychologists and Specialist Nurses all working together to implement an Individual

Education Plan (IEP). Improvements in skills are often dramatic when programmes are properly funded and coordinated and followed through primary and secondary education.

Sadly parents have to fight every step of the way from early detection to early intervention to follow-up in school and for respite and in-home care. Most children including Seán experience delays and patchy or non-existent Individual Education Plans and fail to

reach their potential. The policy of putting children in 'Eclectic Autism Units' is a recipe for failure as they mostly lack professional supports from therapists or even trained teachers and often do not integrate the children with other children, peers, from whom they could learn vital play and social communication skills.

Principal Larry Fleming highlighted the general funding concerns in Primary schools: "At the moment we have the farcical situation whereby

a child's education is funded to the tune of 96 cent per day, half the cost of a loaf of bread."

Many parents anxiously followed the O' Cuanacháin's case hoping that justice in their case would mean the government would properly fund intensive intervention programmes for other children with Autism but these hopes have been dashed by Hanafin's attitude of 'make do and cut back' while she relishes her massive pay rise.

Give me some of that old time Religion

REG EMPEY of the Ulster Unionists has warned that remarks by Wallace Thompson, who is secretary of the Evangelical Protestant Society in Belfast could harm investment by American firms in the North.

Thompson in a letter to the Irish Times had objected to the sale of rosary beads in St. Patrick's, a Church of Ireland Cathedral, in Dublin. When challenged on this, Thompson added for good measure that "the



Reg Empey

Pope is the anti-Christ and that he would object to any of his daughters marrying a Catholic". In the bizarre world of

the Northern Assembly Wallace Thompson was recently appointed as an advisor to Nigel Dodds, the DUP minister for Enterprise.

If that was not enough John Taylor, the Unionist peer, who likes to be known as Lord Kilclooney, speaking recently in Athlone, announced that he is worried about the fall-off in Mass-going and religious observance in the Republic. He went on to tell his audience "that there was more to life than money".

The power grab behind Cork football strike

By DEIRDRE CRONIN

THE STRIKE by Cork hurlers and footballers looks no closer to resolution following the intervention of Kieran Mulvey, chairman of the Labour Relations Commission.

The failure to listen to and respect the views of players is at the heart of the dispute.

In November a new manager of the Cork football team was appointed under a new procedure despite the concerns of players.

A number of candidates approached to take on the

position refused in the circumstances.

The undercurrent to this dispute is a power grab that seems to be orchestrated by senior administrators in Cork GAA circles to reverse the gains that players made in 2002 when they successfully took action to win better facilities and conditions.

Players should be commended for standing firm and showing such commitment to demanding the highest of standards in the sport to which they have devoted so much of their time.

Hospital Consultants: Stuff their mouths with gold

By PEADAR O'GRADY

CONSULTANTS in Irish public hospitals have been offered an obscene €75,000 a year pay rise only weeks after nurses, who went on strike for a €4,000 rise, were given nothing at all in the benchmarking deal.

This massive 40% increase for the elite medics comes on top of an existing salary of around €165,000 a year giving a total salary of €240,000.

And that is only for public patients! Consultants earn an average extra €200,000 a year in fees for private patients giving a grand total of over €400,000 a year!

And for what? Consultants in public hospitals are to have their private practice limited to 20% of their patients. But it was already limited to 20% — and this was regularly exceeded in the past.

Why should it be any different in the future?

Harney's claim of 'reform' and a 'public contract' turns out to be nothing but the lie it always was.

When Aneurin Bevan founded the British National Health Service in the 1940s, he famously said that his strategy with consultants was to 'stuff their mouths with gold' to shut up their opposition to full public contracts.

Harney on the other hand has stuffed consultants' mouths with gold to stop any opposition to the privatisation of Irish healthcare and the mega profits of corporations like the multinational Triad/Beacon.

This disgusting bribe should be condemned without reserve by trade unionists and health activists.

2008 will see further attacks on the health service and other public services backed up by the Lisbon Treaty.

It's time to fight back for decent pay for ordinary health workers and for a decent public health service.

An all out strike by nurses and a mass campaign against the Lisbon treaty would be a good start.

Save Our Canteen

By GERRY CARROLL

MANAGEMENT in the University of Ulster, Jordanstown Campus want to shut the canteen and give the green light for a fast food corporation to take over the running of this student facility.

This idea is part of a wider agenda which focuses on gaining as much profit as possible from the campus facilities whilst squeezing students for every penny they have through any available avenue. This scheme is to be adopted across all University of Ulster campuses.

Towards the end of 2007 the Save Our Canteen group initiated by People Before Profit in Jordanstown was designed to halt this measure.

A public meeting calling for resistance to the privatisation and job cuts drew over 70 students and workers.

Thousands of petitions have been signed in every campus showing that the support lies with the campaign and not the management. Pickets have been held at Coleraine and various other places where the University council meets, highlighting the strong sentiment existing across every campus wishing for this decision to be reversed.

A demonstration was planned for Thursday 7th February. The Save Our Canteen group is essential in order to unite workers and students in defending facilities from privatization and to prevent further job cuts.

'Village' residents condemn the DUP

By SEAN MITCHELL

ON TUESDAY 22nd of January, around a hundred people, from the Village area in Belfast, gathered at the steps of Stormont to protest against the appalling housing conditions in the area.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has not lived up to its commitments to tackle the current housing crisis.

Thousands of people have been left on the housing waiting list while thousands more are forced to live in poor conditions, without proper facilities or adequate heating. This is particularly acute in the Village, in South Belfast and is now at breaking point

One community worker in the Area, Margaret Couchman explained why they protested, "We protested against the lack of movement and the excuses by the DSD and DUP Minister Peter Robinson.

"One is blaming the other for the refusal of money to tackle the diabolical housing conditions within the village area".

"All we care about is how this affects the lives of the residents in the village area. Another man died in appalling conditions over the Christmas period.

"His door was forced open and he was found dead on the chair with his oven on providing the heat for his home. One pensioner stayed in her overcoat, hat, gloves scarf and hat on".

The anger of the people



DUP Assembly members Robinson and Paisley

was made evident when DUP MLA Jimmy Spratt attempted to join the protest. He was told in no uncertain terms that he was not welcome. He was shouted down by protes-

tors who rightly pointed out that "he doesn't represent us". He has been challenged to spend just one night in the Village. Unfortunately he is yet to respond.

Significantly, the protestors were joined, by people from West Belfast and students from Queens University.

This shows the way for-

ward. No change can come for working class people from parties like the DUP.

It is only through united struggle that real advancements can be secured

Belfast post workers put management in their place

BY A huge majority—73 per cent—workers at the Belfast Royal Mail Tomb St depot voted at the start of February in favour of a strike.

The action is against management's blatant disregard for disciplinary

procedures. Management wish to be able to walk all over workers regardless of the little protection awarded to them by company procedures and government legislation. They took disciplinary

action against workers without entering into agreement with CWU reps. These actions are part of a wider campaign to break the union in Belfast and beyond. Royal Mail believes that the CWU is weak because

its leadership accepted a shoddy deal on pay in 2007.

This is an example to all trade unionists, that strikes and solidarity can win, just like CWU members in Belfast did in 2005.

No passion for Ann Widdicombe



By GORETTI HORGAN

ON ONE of the coldest, wettest nights of January, about 50 people protested in Belfast outside the "Passion for Life" tour organised by Tory MP

Ann Widdicombe and other anti-abortion parliamentarians.

There were almost as many on the protest as there were people going into the meeting and those protesting were

considerably younger than the overwhelmingly grey-haired audience. Protesters included trade unionists including UNISON and UNITE members, students and long-time pro-choice activists.

Despite the driving sleet, the protesters enjoyed showing that it is a myth that "no one in NI wants legalised abortion". The most popular chant was "we've got bigots galore, we don't need anymore".

Assembly's Budget cuts Youth Services

By MATT COLLINS

ON FRIDAY the 25th of January around 150 people turned out to a public meeting in Corpus Christi youth centre in West Belfast to address the effects that the recent Budget passed by the N. Ireland assembly would have on youth services.

The result of the budget is that 25 full time youth workers will lose their jobs in Belfast alone as not enough money is being given to local community groups etc in order to provide suitable services to young people throughout the country.

A national wage settlement and a cut of 4.5% has left the service £400,000 short, these 25 positions are of vital importance in local areas as they maintain employment in some of Belfast's most deprived communities.

The Budget architected by DUP minister Peter Robinson has severely cut the assembly's spending on public services directly impacting our youth services.

With all the hype from local politicians about anti social youths ruining the area it is an absolute disgrace that the four main political parties have agreed to a budget that favours big business over public need and cuts spending on the development of young people.

Sean Mitchell, spokesperson for the People Before Profit Alliance said, "Once again our politicians have failed in providing for ordinary people, any cut in our youth services would be disastrous for communities here in Belfast and across Northern Ireland"



Sean Mitchell

"On the one hand they say we must accept the police in working class communities, to tackle "anti social" behaviour.

While on the other hand they cut services which offer young people the only alternative means of spending their time"

"We should build a campaign, in every community to ensure these vital jobs are kept"

From the meeting local community workers alongside various activists have launched a campaign to stop the cuts being imposed by the Assembly and "Save Our Youth Services."

The campaign will be protesting outside Stormont to demand the assembly listens in the coming weeks.

NUS/USI backs anti war demo

ON FRIDAY 1st of February, the National Union of Students / USI backed the Belfast anti-war demonstration, calling on all students to come out in opposition to the war on March 15th.

March 2008 marks the 5th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

So far the occupation has claimed the lives of over 1 million innocent civilians and devastated the country's infrastructure. Since 2003 the world has become a much more dangerous and volatile place.

Despite Gordon Brown's promise of troop withdrawal there are still 5,000 British troops in Iraq alongside thousands of American military units.

Bush and Brown are now pushing for an attack on Iran, any such attack would create a disaster much worse than that in Iraq, driving thousands if not millions into another pointless war.

Meanwhile the Israeli war machine continues to plunder the Palestinian people killing innocents and cutting off supplies from the Gaza strip. On March 15th the Belfast Antiwar Movement are organising a demonstration in Belfast City centre, antiwar activists from around the city will March from the Arts College to the City Hall calling for the withdraw of all troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, No attack on Iran and an end to the Israeli siege on Gaza.

The Dublin demonstration assemblies at 1pm Parnell Sq on March 15.

To help organise for the demonstration call Matt Collins on 07815796312 or email belfastantiwar@yahoo.co.uk

Recession looms! Will the unions fight?

By KIERAN ALLEN

LAST MONTH, saw the biggest jump in unemployment since 1980. All over the country jobs are being cut, particularly in manufacturing.

The case of Allergen in Wicklow shows what is at stake. Here a major medical company made sizeable profits for nearly twenty years and experienced hardly any industrial action from workers.

But despite behaving as model employees, the company has treated the workers with contempt.

360 jobs will go when the factory moves to Costa Rica where wages are less than €8 a day for factory workers. A local English language newspaper explains why Costa Rica is so attractive to multi-nationals.

Costa Rica closely controls salaries. While countries to the north have minimum wages, Costa Rica has a separate minimum wage for nearly every type of job. And the numbers keep changing, thanks to a continual devaluation of the colon.

Every six months the government negotiates salary increases with various employee unions.

If the negotiations fail, as they did in November, the president may issue a decree setting the new salaries in conjunction with the Consejo Nacional de Salarios.

Jacob Fruitfield

A similar situation has developed in Jacob Fruitfield in Tallaght. Here 220 jobs will go as a profitable company again outsources work to other parts of the world.

Up to now the union leaders have not encouraged resistance to redundancies.

The leaders of SIPTU and the ICTU have been sucked into 'tri-partite' bodies where they continually interact with the government and IBEC.

They think it is their patriotic duty not to rock the boat in Ireland's multi-national sector.

Despite some success in union recruitment drives, no serious at-

tempt has been made to organise in a major US plant in recent years.

This lack of resistance leaves workers more vulnerable to the right wing arguments. These suggest that 'workers are pricing themselves out of a job' and must show wage restraint.

Some economists, like Jim Power, go even further and claim that social partnership should be scrapped.

They think that the unions have been weakened by two decades of national partnership deals and calculate that they can now push matters even further and impose severe wage cuts.

But the constant refrain about the need for more competitiveness ignores a number of elementary facts.

At present Ireland is ranked 16 out of 24 EU countries its wage costs. The average worker costs his or her employer €38,541 a year compared to, for example, €52,564 a year in France.

Workers, of course, do not receive this figure – as it includes social security and training costs.

But what is remarkable is that even though Ireland is one of the most expensive economies in Europe – its wage costs are in the bottom half of the EU league. This occurs because there are a large number of workers who are getting very low wages already.

When right wing economists talk about competitiveness, they mean getting down to Polish or Eastern European levels. But they are careful not to spell out what this 'competitive' wage might be.

Polish wage costs at the moment are about €10,000 a year while other Eastern European countries such as Slovakia are €13,000. Costa Rican and Chinese and Indian rates are even lower.

Once the actual figures are examined, one clear thing emerges: Workers are not going to see their wages reduced to these 'competitive' levels.

Their only alternative, therefore, must be to fight.



Nurses take action last year

Photo: Paula Geraghty

Construction: A disaster in the making

THE CRANES have disappeared over Dublin's skylines and the construction industry is in sharp decline.

The building bosses are using coming recession to bring about a whole scale shift to agency work. Agency work is their favoured device for wrecking conditions built up in the past.

Agency work in being used to

- Cut the standard rate of pay. A grade D building worker should be paid €16.93 an hour but agencies are only paying €14.88 an hour.
- Stop Overtime rates. Building workers are supposed to receive time and a half after 4.30. Agency workers do not.
- Remove Travel Time: Building workers are entitled to payments for the miles they travel to work.

The agencies, however, have abolished travel time.

■ Stop pension contributions. Employers are supposed to pay into a pension fund but many get around this through agency work.

On top of this general strategy, the employers are carefully fomenting divisions between Irish and non-Irish workers.

They are using the vulnerable

position of Eastern European workers – who are denied social welfare payments for two years – to press down wages further.

The unions need to quickly change from policies that sought a social peace to once again embrace struggles.

They need clear, decisive policies that prepare the movement for the coming recession.

How the unions can tackle recession

FAR FROM giving into calls to be more 'competitive' the unions must propose their own alternative approach and popularise it throughout society.

- Such policies must include
- Support resistance to redundancies. Companies like Allergen and Jacob Fruitfield

should not be given a cost-free ticket to withdraw from Ireland.

Workers should be encouraged to prevent the movement of equipment through factory occupations. Even where jobs are not preserved, companies should be forced to pay for re-training

costs and very high redundancy payments of ten weeks plus for every year service.

- Tackle the cancer of agency work. The union need to re-mobilise in large Irish Ferries style demonstrations to demand an end to agency work.

They should back up any

group of workers who want to continue with direct work.

- Demand a scheme of public works for the construction industry. Ireland lacks a decent infrastructure and is still facing a shortage of accommodation.

It needs a major scheme of public works to weather the storm of recession.

Such a level of state directed investment may require a breach in the EU Growth and Stability pact which limits borrowing to 3 percent. But other countries are also in the same predicament.

- Re-Train and Re-Skill older workers. 55 percent of young people now receive third level education.

Older workers in manufacturing are most vulnerable if an economy is re-structured to more 'knowledge based' services. Although they pay taxes all their lives, they are charged heavily if they want to do part time education courses. The third level institutions should be told to open their doors and help re-skill this section of society.

Benchmarking shows its time to scrap 'Partnership'

By DEIRDRE CRONIN

THE RECOMMENDATIONS of the second benchmarking report have caused outrage across the public sector.

An Irish Times poll, which shows only 25% of those questioned were in favour of the reports recommendations, would also seem to indicate that this anger is not just confined to those on the receiving end of the 0% recommendation.

It has copper-fastened a pay system whereby those at the top of the occupational structure will see wages and benefits rapidly increase while those in the middle and lower ranks

will be expected to take the hit in pay terms in the interests of "the economy"

The issue of pensions was a key factor in making this recommendation. Public sector workers are now being penalised for having decent defined benefit pensions.

The idea that an adequate pension is treated as a luxury item that workers should not be entitled to as of right is dangerous and if accepted will be used to vindicate the disgraceful level of pension provision in the private sector.

The benchmarking report was used as the carrot to push through a national

pay agreement that granted increases that barely kept pace with inflation, and to entice nurses off picket lines. It has now been exposed as the con job that it was.

It's time for workers to reject the whole process of social partnership.

Union leaders, feeling the pressure, have already indicated that a new pay agreement should not be taken for granted. However unless we build pressure from below, the trade union leadership will once again try to sell a rotten deal by claiming a lack of alternative. It's time to start organising for an alternative now.

Vote Kieran Allen for SIPTU General Secretary



KIERAN ALLEN, a SIPTU shop steward in UCD for ten years, is standing as a grassroots candidate for General Secretary of SIPTU.

His opponent is Joe Flynn, the present incumbent and a supporter of the current union direction.

The election will take place between the end of April and May.

Kieran Allen's election address claims that SIPTU has gone too soft and needs to change. He cites the failure of benchmarking in the public sector and restrictions on private sector workers putting in any 'cost-increasing' claims.

He wants a shift in direction so that the union never settles for pay rises that are less than the rate of inflation and promotes resistance to the oncoming wave of redundancies.

Campaign material for the election can be received either by ringing 087 2839964 or by emailing kallen@iol.ie

By SARA O'ROURKE

IRISH TROOPS are to be deployed as part of an EU Mission to Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR). Their departure was delayed due to increased activity from rebel forces.

The media claims that much of this violence is occurring because the rebels in Chad oppose EU intervention. The latest reports say that rebels captured the airport in N'jamena to stop the arrival of the EU troops.

The operation has been presented in the media as a humanitarian mission to help 100,000+ refugees in Chad. It is lauded as a proud day for the Irish because the operation commander will be an Irish officer.

Far from a humanitarian mission, this operation is designed to prop up a military dictator. Chad's current leader, President Idriss Déby came to power in 1990 by launching a military campaign from across the border, in Darfur (Sudan), and with the support of the Sudanese govt.

In an interview with RTE, Lieutenant General Pat Nash stated that his 'task is to translate diplomatic policy into military action'.

Significantly this is the first time that Irish peacekeepers will be able to use 'all necessary measures to achieve the mandated tasks'.

Chad won independence from France in 1960 and has been wracked by internal and international conflicts ever since.

Armed opposition to Déby, increased in intensity in 2005 with defections from the army reinforcing several rebel movements. Both Sudan and Libya have sponsored groups in Chad over the years with Darfur a base for Chadian dissidents since the '80s. Déby allied himself with the Chadian Arabs after he too was forced into exile in Darfur. He had support from Chadian Arabs until a rebel attack against the capital city, N'jamena in 2006 led him to disarm and arrest Arab officers in the Chadian national army.

In North Africa the term 'Arab' is used to describe tribes with a nomadic lifestyle as opposed to ethnically Arab from the Middle



Irish army in the service of Empire

East. All of these 'Arab' tribes are black.

The complicated political situation has seen the government of Sudan backing Chadian rebels and militias in Darfur while the government of Chad has supported Sudanese rebel groups in eastern Chad, which in turn have supported the creation of self-defense groups at community level in Chad. The 'jajjaweed' militias in Darfur are made up of both Chadian and Sudanese nomads and landless immigrants. The border between Chad and Darfur was an imposed border so members of the ethnic groups from the core of the Sudanese rebel movements have ethnic kin in Chad.

In 2005 Chadian troops defected with their equipment to Chadian rebel movements in Darfur. By 2006 Déby had cut off relations with Sudan and was overtly supporting the Sudanese rebel movements and vice versa. Sudanese rebel groups from Darfur supported the Chadian government forces in fighting against Chadian rebels. There has since been a tentative peace agreement signed in Tripoli but fighting continues.

Colonialism continues

For 22 years 1,200 French troops have been stationed in Chad, a former French colony. In 2006 France provided military air-



Above: Chad has been ruined by foreign interference

craft to the Chadian government for aerial surveillance of the border with Sudan. Sarkozy recently visited the country to give support to the dictator.

Chad exports a lot of cotton, an industry recently privatised. It also has gold but more importantly it has oil. It became a net petroleum exporter after the Chad-Cameroon pipeline came online in 2003. Many consider Chad to have more oil resources.

Environmentalists and African NGO's fear that the project will cause huge environmental damage and it is widely acknowledged in Africa that the Chadian economy is dominated by foreign powers.

The Doba basin oil project came about after Exxonmobil, in a consortium with Chevron and Petronas invested \$3.7 billion to develop the oil reserves in southern Chad. The World Bank also contributed to the pipeline and agreements were signed in which the Chadian government promised to spend 80% of oil revenues on development projects.

Despite high oil prices Chad is still the world's fifth poorest country, with a population 9 million people. Little of the oil money is spent by the government on development.

While it seems that wherever there is oil there is strife it is also about much more. The landscape of power in the world is shifting and this is being played out in Africa. China is trying to gain control of Sudanese oil. Sudan is also competing for power in Chad. Sarkozy is lending support to Chadian dictator, with many saying that Déby could not remain in power without French support.

Why are Irish troops being deployed into a situation like this? What military action will Pat Nash be leading Irish troops into? Protecting civilians, refugees and aid or protecting an oil supply that needs safe passage through a pipeline, out of a strife ridden country.

A multinational military force propping up a corrupt dictator will be resisted. Especially if those troops include the previous colonial master. Irish troops have now been drafted into the EU Empire's police force.

The Lisbon Treaty, the EU and militarisation

ONE OF the more disturbing aspects of the Lisbon Treaty is the way it creates new openings for involvement in military adventures.

The Treaty would increase the militarisation of the EU, as all states would have to increase their military spending. The Treaty commits the EU to working with US dominated NATO and therefore

closely ties Europe to US foreign policy.

What remains of Irish neutrality would be even further undermined.

Since the Irish population last voted on the Nice Treaty, the EU has been developing a new military strategy based on 'battle groups'. Few people, apart, possibly, from the Irish Defence Secretary Willie O'Dea, were under any illusion about what the battle groups were for.

Each battle group is capable of operating at least 6,000 kilometres from the borders of the EU - an area that includes much of Africa and the Middle East.

There is to be one lead nation, which takes operational command, and the battle groups are to be capable of engaging in pre-emptive strikes.

There has been little real debate among the people of Europe about these 'battle groups' and now the Lisbon Treaty is seeking to give constitutional support to these developments.

The Irish government claims that Irish neutrality is still safe in their hands. But this government has already turned Ireland into one of the major US hubs for the conduct of its war on Iraq.

Great play is also made of the need to deploy European troops in 'rescue operations' in places like Darfur where it is implied that a pan-African force would not be sufficiently professional to deal with the situation.

Yet few talk of the need for 'humanitarian intervention' in Somalia where the US backed Ethiopian regime has massacred thousands. Talk of 'humanitarian intervention' is, unfortunately, often a ploy to

bolster the legitimacy of the big powers in new efforts to create spheres of influence.

The EU battle groups will be used to assert the 'right' of the big powers on the Western Europe to reclaim spheres of influence from Russia in central Europe and from China in many African countries.

Increased Arms Spending

The Lisbon Treaty commits governments to increase their spending on the military.

In 2004 the European Defence Agency (EDA) was formed. It is the first EU initiated armaments agency and was a big victory for the arms manufacturers. Its

express aim is to increase defence budgets across the EU; promote 'interoperability' between the different national armies so they are using similar weaponry; and help develop a vision of Europe's long term military needs.

The Lisbon Treaty requires countries to engage in higher levels of military spending to fulfil the dreams of the military planners who wrote this EDA blueprint for imperialist adventures.

The Lisbon Treaty gives the EU the power 'to fight terrorism, including supporting third countries in combating terrorism'.

Who are these countries which the EU will support in

combating terrorism and who will dictate which enemy is to be fought? It is by no means clear.

It could include the US if it faced another terrorist attack and wanted to lash out at Iran or Syria, which it deemed responsible for 'supporting terrorism'. Or it could be a host of pro-Western governments in Africa, which the EU Commission itself decided were in need of support against 'terrorist' insurgents. The clause is entirely open ended.

A further 'solidarity clause' goes even further and obliges different governments to come to each others assistance in the event of a terrorist attack.

REASONS TO VOTE NO TO THE LISBON TREATY
EU Constitution Referendum 2008

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Gaza:



'THE WEE WE BROKE THEIR PRI STATE'

*For daring to elect
government the p
been starved of fo
the West. Now, u
they refuse to be p*

THE MIDDLE East witnessed the dizzying potential of mass movements from below over four days last week. Walls tumbled, a dictator was humiliated and US strategy to isolate the Palestinian resistance was smashed into ruins.

It began on the morning of Tuesday 22 January when thousands of Palestinian women and children laid siege to the border crossing at Rafah separating Egypt from the Palestinian territory.

The demonstrators were demanding entry into Egypt following Israel's tightening of its grip over the Gaza Strip.

Since the outbreak of the second intifada (uprising) in 2000, the Gaza Strip has been economically isolated. In 2005 the resistance forced Israel to abandon its illegal settlements established when it seized the territory in the 1967 war.

This withdrawal was followed by a shock 2006 election victory for the Hamas movement – a resistance organisation that rejects any peace deal with Israel that does not address the central issues faced by Palestinians. Despite being declared a “free and fair election”, the West refused to recognise the new government.

The Egyptian-Palestine border was closed using the wall built by Israel over 40 years, denying Palestinians a way out of Gaza and stranding hundreds of Gazan residents on the Egyptian side.

Israel, the US and Egypt attempted a coup in June 2007, but this was thwarted when Palestinian security forces refused to join the attack on the Hamas government. Following this failed take over Israel moved to isolate the Gaza Strip completely.

Its blockade of the Gaza Strip was central to a strategy adopted by the US and its allies to bring the Palestinians to their knees. The punishing blockade turned into a full-blown siege after Israel

cut all fuel supplies. This plunged 1.5 million people into darkness.

With the region in the grips of one of the coldest winters for years, desperate groups of women and children marched towards the border crossing.

Egyptian riot police lined up to block them. Some demonstrators chanted insults against Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak as children indignantly slapped the riot shields.

To the cries of “cowards, cowards”, the riot police began to buckle. Around 50 women broke through the border post before they were driven back by gunfire, water cannon and batons.

Security forces

As news spread that Mubarak's hated police were beating desperate Palestinians, Egypt's opposition Muslim Brotherhood and the Socialist Alliance – a coalition of left wing organisations and individuals – issued a call for a demonstration on Wednesday morning on front of the Arab League building in central Cairo.

Other protests were organised outside Egyptian embassies across the Arab capitals.

A terrified Mubarak mobilised his security forces and declared that the demonstration would not go ahead. Hundreds of activists belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood and left wing organisations were seized from their beds, or as they prepared to travel to the capital for the protest.

As Mubarak's security forces were mobilising to snuff out the Cairo protest, Hamas engineers destroyed the border fence that separates the Gaza Strip from Egypt.

It has since been revealed that the engineers had been secretly cutting through the six metre high steel barrier for months. On Wednesday night they brought the whole fence tumbling down.

As word went round that the border



**Bush wanted
to firm up an
alliance of pro-US
regimes against
Iran, Hamas
and Lebanon's
Hizbollah
movement.**

fence had fallen, tens of thousands of Palestinians began crossing into Egypt. The security forces were powerless in the face of this human wave. Some abandoned their posts, while others stood aside.

In Cairo news began to filter through that the border had fallen. Although over 450 key activists had been arrested, 2,000 people began to assemble in Tahrir Square, in the centre of the capital.

Fearful that the attempts to stifle open protests had failed, the state security police shut Cairo's underground stations and swept through working class areas randomly arresting people. For the Egyptian state the enemy was everywhere.

The chants of “cowards, cowards”

were taken up by the demonstrators in Cairo.

As news reached the demonstrations that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were now flooding into Egypt the riot police attacked protesters chasing them into side streets. Over 1,500 were arrested.

But the crackdown could not stop what was rapidly becoming a major humiliation for Mubarak. With his border police in disarray and his riot police retreating in the face of a mass of people, he announced on national TV that he had in fact “invited the Palestinians in”.

“I told the security forces to allow the Palestinians to buy their basic needs and go back to Gaza as long as they are not carrying arms or anything illegal,” he said.

EVENTS ALONG the border with Gaza have further weakened Mubarak's rule after over 26 years in power. Since December 2006 a wave of strikes, factory occupations and protests have broken his regime of fear.

This growing popular power is giving rise to a new generation of young militants, with women and young workers often taking the lead.

The movement from below is growing at such a pace, one veteran left wing activist described its impact as “dizzying”. “After years of small deeds in the face of harsh repression, we are overwhelmed by the scale and depth of the movement,” he told Socialist Worker.

Mubarak's regime is a key US ally in the region. Two weeks ago George Bush dropped in on the Egyptian dictator in the last stop on his “democracy tour” of the Middle East.

Bush wanted to firm up an alliance of pro US-regimes against Iran, Hamas and Lebanon's Hizbollah movement.

At the heart of this strategy was isolating any resistance to imperialism and its allies.

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The Egyptians s

WEEK ROKE R PRISON



For daring to elect a Hamas government the people of Gaza have been starved of food and supplies by the West. Now, writes **Simon Assaf**, they refuse to be pushed any further

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Israel took the cue from the visit to unleash a new round of murderous attacks on the Gaza Strip.
The cutting of fuel supplies would be the final blow, and as the territory descended into darkness the Palestinians would see the "error of their ways" and turn on the Hamas government.
But instead of humbling Hamas, the resistance movement blew holes in Israeli policy.
The siege was undone. A frustrated Israeli minister announced on Thursday that Israel was "washing its hands" of the Gaza Strip.
"We need to understand that when Gaza is open to the other side we lose responsibility for it," the minister said. "So we want to disconnect from it."
These mealy mouthed words indicated that after 38 years of occupation, settlements and a rule of terror, the Israelis are finally admitting defeat.
The Israeli statement set off alarm bells in the White House.
The under secretary of state Nicholas Burns called Mubarak and demanded that the "border be sealed", while the US Congress threatened to withhold \$100 million in aid if the Egyptians did not reimpose the siege.
Responsibility
Meanwhile the Egyptian government denounced the Israeli statement saying that Palestine "was Israel's responsibility".
The Egypt/Gaza border was transformed into a festival. According to the United Nations by Thursday morning, "roughly 350,000 Palestinians - or more than 20 percent of Gaza's population of about 1.5 million - walked, drove or rode on donkey carts into Egypt".
By Sunday this reached 750,000. Many families were visiting loved ones, stocking up on supplies or enjoying the atmosphere of freedom.
The Egyptian state set up a new, tem-

porary border in the city of El-Arish, about 37 miles from Rafah. The panic caused led US and international military observers stationed near the Egyptian city to abandon their base. As the Palestinians moved in, the troops and their equipment moved out.
On Friday Mubarak ordered his police back to the border while security forces rampaged through El-Arish attacking Egyptians who were giving aid to Palestinians.
They set up roadblocks across the Sinai to stop any more supplies from

Cairo conference

27 to 30 March, Egypt

THE CAIRO Conference is a unique event. It is organised by activists in Egypt who are opposed to war and neoliberal globalisation. It brings together people from the anti-war and social movements, trade unions, radical parties and the national liberation organisations. A theme of the conference will be mobilising a campaign against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians through the siege of the

Gaza Strip has created revulsion across the globe. After tens of thousands of Palestinians broke through the Gazan border into Egypt, hundreds of activists were rounded up by the police. Leading figures from the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas are set to address this year's Cairo Conference. Hundreds of delegates from across Europe are expected to attend. Why not join them?
For more information contact info@irishantiwar.org

reaching the Gaza Strip.
That afternoon the Egyptian riot police attempted to reassert control over the Rafah border. A cordon of riot police nine deep formed along the breached fence in an attempt to stop any more Palestinians from escaping their Gaza prison.
They were met with a barrage of stones while militants used a bulldozer to demolish another section of the border fence. By Sunday the border fortifications had been reduced to rubble.
The Egyptian government has been forced to invite representatives of the

Hamas government to talks, breaking the boycott imposed by the US and Israel. The Israelis have agreed to allow sup-

plies back into the strip. The siege and the occupation of the Gaza Strip are over, for now.

Five years since the US led invasion of Iraq...

DEMONSTRATE 15 MARCH

WORLD AGAINST WAR

Global protest

- US Troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan
- Don't Attack Iran
- US troops and torture flights out of Shannon
- Justice for Palestine

Assemble 1pm, Parnell Sq, Dublin.
Called by Irish Anti-War Movement
Supported by PANA, NGO Peace Alliance.
www.irishantiwar.org
www.worldagainstar.org

EDITORIAL

Are we facing a 1930s style slump?

Many people, who a year ago would have said they were broadly happy with the system, are today wondering what on earth is happening.

The instability within the capitalist system means that no one knows what is going to happen in the economy over the next year – and that uncertainty is striking fear into the ruling class.

Ahern and Cowan's predictions that Ireland can 'weather the storm' are ridiculous. 15% of the workforce is in the building industry – the industry hardest hit by the crisis. Ireland is the most globalised economy in the world and as such is more exposed to global financial turmoil than other countries. A massive 60% of the Irish stock exchange is composed of banks, construction and hedge funds. The US, which is now in recession, is our major trading partner.

These facts mean Ireland will be hit hard by what George Soros claimed at the World Economic Forum may be the deepest depression in global capitalism since the 1930s.

The ruling class everywhere is anxious that a recession could drive many companies into a spiral of bankruptcy, but it is also worried about the ideological impact that a major recession can have.

Two weeks ago Martin Wolf, an important columnist on the Financial Times newspaper, wrote, "I now fear that the combination of the fragility of the financial system with the huge rewards it generates for insiders will destroy something even more important – the political legitimacy of the market economy itself."

Who will pay for the crisis?

The example of Northern Rock in Britain shows that the ruling class want to bail themselves out at the expense of workers. 50 Billion was found to bail out Northern Rock. Instead of nationalising it Gordon Brown simply handed the money over to private hands.

Factory closures must be resisted. Why should bosses be allowed simply to walk away after years of profits. If jobs can't be saved companies should be forced, by occupying workplaces if necessary, to pay heavy redundancy and staff re-training costs.

Instead of construction workers facing insecurity and unemployment the government should step in and start a programme of public works like schools and social housing to bridge Ireland's infrastructure gap.

Socialists do not welcome economic crisis. We know that it is the working class, not the rich, who are going to suffer.

We also know that such crises do not automatically lead to revolt – they lead to anger, which has to be channelled into a fight with the system if it is not to lead to demoralisation.

The 1930s are today known as the "hungry 30s". But the political bitterness of that period also created mass movements of the left across the world – leading to workers' occupations of factories across the US, mass strikes in France and a workers' revolution in Spain.

In such circumstances strikes can provide the focus for all the accumulated bitterness in society and can politically polarise society along class lines, creating a "them and us" feeling.

They can provide huge opportunities for the left to pose its own alternative to capitalism.

Bosses will use every means at their disposal to disperse such feeling. We can expect right wing newspapers and politicians to whip up scares over immigration and asylum seekers in an effort to divert the bitterness away from class struggle.

The most important challenges for the left today are firstly to win people to the idea that capitalism is a mad system and that we need an alternative.

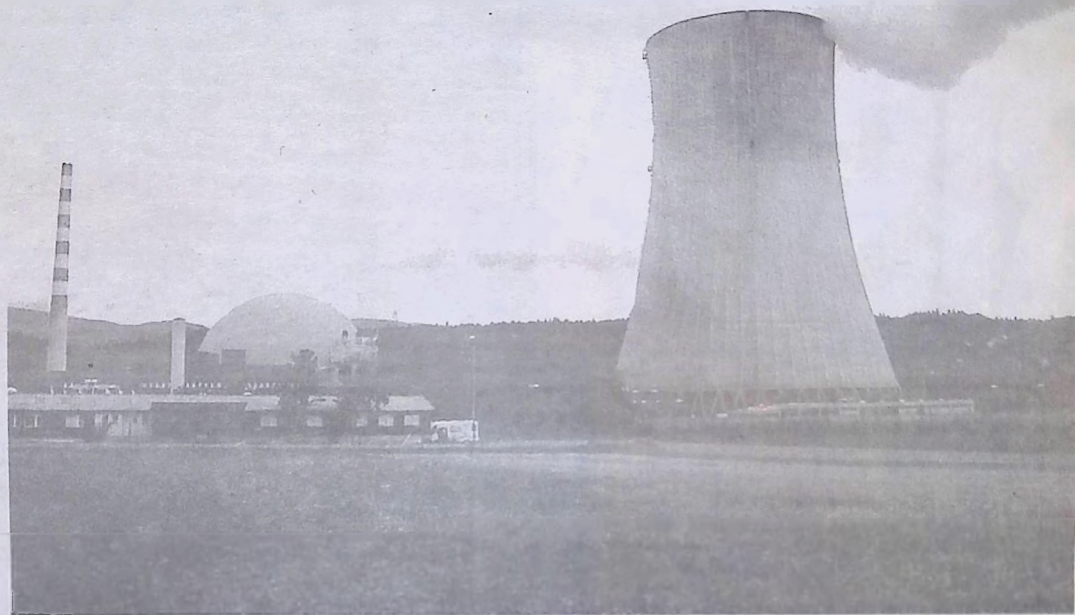
Secondly, there must be an argument in every workplace about the pay limits and why the unions should fight against them.

Lastly socialists must involve themselves in every campaign against neoliberalism and war, and fight to create political connections between different struggles.

The biggest mistake we can make is to believe we can respond to the crisis with trade unionism alone. In order to beat the employers offensive it is vital that we respond in a political way.

OPINION

Is nuclear power the answer to climate change?



by TOM WILLIAMS

THE BATTLE against nuclear had been won. After 30 years of campaigning by environmentalists, governments across Europe were planning to close their remaining nuclear power plants: the future was renewable energy.

AS RECENTLY as 2003, the British Government's Energy White Paper proposed to solve that country's energy problems with a focus on emerging renewable technologies—such as wind and wave power—and an end to decades of heavy subsidies for the nuclear industry.

Then, something unexpected happened. In late 2004, George Bush finally gave in to the overwhelming scientific evidence and admitted that climate change was a real problem.

Earlier that year, the famed environmentalist James Lovelock had declared that nuclear power—and the low-carbon energy it provides—was the only way to stop climate change. All of a sudden, governments began talking about "the nuclear option" again. While no environmentalist would disagree that climate change is the great-

est threat facing our planet today, most are deeply opposed to nuclear power. But what is the reality of the situation: does nuclear really offer a solution to climate change?

It is undeniably true that nuclear power generates much lower carbon emissions than conventional fossil fuels: about 1/20th the carbon dioxide of gas, or 1/50th that of coal per unit of electricity. While building nuclear plants and mining the uranium required to fuel them results in carbon emissions, environmental destruction, and health risks for miners, these impacts do not compare to the damage done by coal mining.

Two further alarming risks of nuclear are an accident—as happened in Chernobyl—or a terrorist attack.

However, it could be argued that the chances of either of these events occurring are low, and they are outweighed by the certain death and devastation of unchecked climate change.

Does all this mean that socialists should be in favour of nuclear power? No: at least three strong arguments against nuclear remain.

The first is quite simple: there is a clear link between nuclear

power and nuclear weapons. Every country that has developed nuclear weapons over the last half-century—from Israel to Pakistan, India, North Korea and Iran—has done so as an extension of a nuclear power programme. The spread of nuclear power increases the proliferation of nuclear weapons and therefore increases the chance of nuclear war.

The second significant problem with nuclear power is that of waste. While it is, in principle, possible to store nuclear waste safely, few countries—or companies—bother to go to the expense. This has led to a catalogue of scandals worldwide where hazardous waste has been released unsealed into the environment, such as at Sellafield in Cumbria or Yucca Mountain in the USA. At present, neither the US nor UK governments have any long-term strategy for dealing with accumulating nuclear waste.

In fact, the huge costs of dealing with this waste are a factor in the third major disadvantage of nuclear power: its expense versus other forms of low-carbon energy. No nuclear plant in the world actually makes money: all rely on government subsidy. Much of this is due

to the cost of cleaning up old power plants that are going out of service (£70 billion sterling and rising in the UK), but it also comes from the cost of insuring against accidents which must be borne by the state (no private insurer would risk it). It is hard to get clear facts about the real costs of nuclear energy but it is telling that no comparison has tried to build one on the "free market" for over twenty years in the UK.

Nuclear power requires heavy subsidies that would be better spent on renewable energy—which doesn't have the problems of pollution and safety—and on methods to reduce carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, such as carbon stripping the carbon dioxide from power plant exhaust and burying it underground.

These are proven technologies which can provide cleaner and safer energy than nuclear power—but they don't have a lobby with the political influence of the nuclear industry.

Climate change has complicated the arguments about nuclear energy, but it is still the wrong choice for anyone concerned about the environment.

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

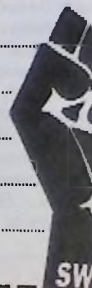
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A friend of the West

THE UNITED States administration sees Kenya as a strategic ally in the "war on terror" particularly as it borders countries including Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.

The government has allowed military bases for both the US and Britain, as well as anchorage in Mombasa for naval vessels.

The country's fabled "stability" has allowed it to be used as a base for NGOs and Western based firms operating around Africa.

Though economic growth in recent years has averaged around 6 percent this has not been equally distributed.

There has been an enormous expansion in the consumption of the rich. New shopping malls and coffee shops are constantly opening.

The growth is not based on raw materials such as oil, as in Nigeria, but on tourism, and exports of fruit, flowers and tea.



Mwai Kibaki - election fraud.

Corruption is a real and ongoing issue in Kenya as with many African countries – but the West's hypocrisy is breathtaking.

In the same way that a country like Kenya can be described as "democratic" because it has been allied to the West through its long period of dictatorship, corruption only becomes an issue when it threatens the interests of Western companies.



Opposition leader Raila Odinga

Furthermore the policies that are pushed by organisations like the World Bank on countries such as Kenya associate lack of corruption and "good governance" with neoliberal policies and deregulation.

Government anti-corruption programmes target the poor by bulldozing illegally built shanty towns rather than confronting the culture of corruption among the elite.

As with privatisations in Ireland and developments in the health service and education, these policies inevitably lead to less democratic control and accountability.

It is precisely the kind of grassroots control that socialists talk about that is more likely to challenge corruption.



Kenya behind the turmoil

by KEN OLENDE

DEMONSTRATORS ARE still challenging the legitimacy of president Mwai Kibaki, who claims he was re-elected in the 27 December 2007 election. However, more evidence has emerged of the scale of the election fraud.

Kenans For Peace With Truth And Justice has compared the number of votes cast in the simultaneous parliamentary election with those in the disputed presidential election.

Vastly more votes are recorded in the presidential election.

The opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) was boosted by the parliamentary votes. It won 99 seats in the 210 seat parliament, to 43 for Kibaki's PNU party. ODM was able to gain the positions of speaker and deputy speaker against resistance from PNU.

However, ODM's response outside parliament to government attacks has been inconsistent and confusing. In mid January it called off protests and demanded a boycott of companies owned by members of the government. Now the protests are back on.

Zahid, a socialist in Nairobi, said, "There is no groundswell of opposition on the street, as the atmosphere is so intimidating. The police have a shoot to kill policy."

Michael Holman wrote in the Financial Times, "The gap between the haves and the have-nots is widening. To see the crisis only in terms of tribal allegiances and ethnic clashes is to miss a vital element in the Kenyan picture."

"The population has doubled in 25 years to 31 million. Unemployment is growing, and the number without land is growing. For these people there is nothing to lose by taking to the streets, driven by frustration and fury that transcend their tribe."

There is huge competition for scarce fertile land, especially in areas like the Rift Valley where much of the worst ethnic violence has occurred.



Class not tribal divisions

THE MAIN divide in Kenya is not between ethnic groups, but between rich and poor. The people who are suffering are the urban and rural poor.

Ethnic groups, popularly called "tribes", are relatively fluid. Indeed many modern tribes were given their current dimensions and even names when they were classified by 19th century colonialists.

Intermarriage between groups was not uncommon – to the extent that there is a Kikuyu saying "We marry our enemies".

Zahid, a socialist in Nairobi, said, "Many people believe that impoverished Kikuyu share the spoils of the rich elite. Despite the ugly ethnic clashes, the majority of the confirmed killings have been by the internal security forces attacking protesters."

"And these are not ethnic attacks by a Kikuyu dominated state on non-Kikuyus. In Nairobi's Kariobangi slum the GSU paramilitary police

attacked Kikuyu slum dwellers.

In fact, the 600 deaths since the election are not exceptional. Only last year a government crackdown on the Kikuyu Mungiki gang in Nairobi's slums led to 500 deaths.

Ironically, the gang is now acting as an ally of the government.

Otieno, a trade unionist in Nairobi, said, "Mungiki have been fighting against protesters. They are being given uniforms and armed."

Historian Daniel Branch has recently argued in the London Review of Books that, "The centres of anti-Kikuyu activity experienced similar periods of violence during earlier election campaigns."

"During the so-called 'tribal clashes' of 1992 and 1997, hundreds were killed and thousands forced from their homes as politicians exploited tensions within individual communities over access to resources."

Colonialism continues

THE BRITISH occupied Kenya, east Africa, in the late 19th century when they were rushing to grab the headwaters of the Nile in Lake Victoria, in what is now Uganda. THEY WANTED to stop any other European Empire being able to threaten "British interests" in the Middle East.

In the 1950s Kenya rose up against the British Empire. The uprising was known as the Mau Mau rebellion. The rebellion was crushed by the British. The official figure for rebel deaths was 11,503, while the real toll was probably closer to 30,000. On top of this some 80,000 people were held in detention camps.

Kenya still suffers from the legacy of colonialism and interference from bodies such as the International Monetary Fund.

For instance, a structural adjustment programme in the 1990s devastated the textile industry, cutting employment from 200,000 to 35,000.

Zahid said, "The continuing protests can halt the government, but once in government the question would arise of what could pressurise Odinga to keep his election promises, rather than following Kibaki and the IMF's path".

"Like the ruling party, the ODM is committed to free market policies. A real political alternative to the existing elite is needed. The poor will not get a share of Kenya's wealth unless they can manage to organise independently".

In January 2007 thousands of activists met at the World Social Forum in Nairobi and held a 5,000 strong march against neoliberalism from Kibera to Uhuru Park – just as protesters were attempting in January when they were met with water cannon and tear gas.

Onyango Oloo, one of the organisers of the forum, has answered calls for general calm by saying, "No justice, no peace".

Simone de Beauvoir:

Fighting for Change

A hundred years after her birth, the work of French writer and activist Simone de Beauvoir still has much to offer. Rebecca Pitt looks at her life and the development of her ideas

THIS YEAR marks the centenary of the birth of Simone de Beauvoir, the French writer and philosopher.

She is best known for her feminist classic *The Second Sex* and her famous declaration, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

On publication in 1949 the book received criticism from both the French left and right and was labelled as "poison" by the Catholic church.

Nearly 60 years after its publication, Beauvoir's condemnation of the discrimination women face and her investigation into the "myth of the feminine" continue to have relevance today.

She was not just a provocative and informative writer. She engaged with many of the most important political issues of her time and toward the end of her life was particularly involved in the campaign for women's rights in France.

Beauvoir was brought up in a middle class family, whose economic situation drastically altered as a result of the First World War.

She went on to document her own intellectual development and her increasing rejection of her childhood values and her mother's Catholic influence in a series of autobiographical books which she began to publish during her fifties.

Her desire to write, and brilliance as a student, led her to study at some of Paris's most prestigious institutions.

Here she worked alongside students who would also go on to be some of the most outstanding intellectuals of the day: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jean-Paul Sartre. Initially supporting herself as a teacher, she became a full-time writer during the early 1940s. Her novels were also often illustrative of her own political development, engaging with Resistance and Cold War politics.

One crucial and life-long relationship formed during her time at university was with fellow philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.

They worked and travelled together, visiting countries such as China, Cuba, Japan and Russia.

During the mid-1940s they helped to found the left wing journal *Les Temps Modernes* (Modern Times). Both were concerned with ideas of freedom, ethics, emancipation and oppression. Their relationship remains controversial today.

Some Beauvoir scholars have used textual analysis to reveal the sexist assumptions of commentators who view Beauvoir's writing as purely influenced by Sartre's philosophical development. Similarly, the nature of their open relationship has also been hotly debated.

Beauvoir, like Sartre, did not really become politicised until the Second World War when they formed a group supporting Resistance activities.

As anti-colonialists, they



Simone de Beauvoir (right of photo) at the Paris office of left wing newspaper *La Cause du Peuple* in 1970

Beauvoir held broadly socialist principles, was critical of Stalinist regimes but remained non-partisan throughout her life.

were also involved in campaigns against the French occupation of Algeria. This was a defining battle for the left in France and an issue that polarised national opinion. In 1962, Beauvoir received death threats as a result of speaking out against the abuse of an Algerian woman by French forces.

She also condemned the Vietnam War and demonstrated against the suppression of left wing newspapers by the Gaullist government during 1968.

Beauvoir held broadly socialist principles, was critical of Stalinist regimes but remained non-partisan throughout her life.

Her realisation that she had a privileged class position in comparison to the majority of French women provided the catalyst for her writing of *The Second Sex*.

She scrutinises the assumptions of society's concept of "woman" and the many ways in which women become conditioned to accept certain ideas about ourselves.

The book includes a historical analysis of the roots of women's oppression, a critique of psychoanalysis and a discussion of Frederick Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property,*

and the State.

Beauvoir also discusses the roles that she perceived as being open to women during the 1940s. She argues that women's position in society and the roles they are expected to fulfil are "Other" or inferior when compared with those open to men. She condemned society's emphasis on motherhood and the family.

In the final chapters, Beauvoir discusses her concept of "the independent woman". She cites the need for women's economic and social independence from men through work outside the home and criticised the "double burden" of childcare/housework and working life which many women face.

Although some parts of *The Second Sex* are now dated in their analysis of women's situation, many of the practical issues Beauvoir highlights remain relevant today.

In particular, she notes the importance of women's control over their own fertility, the right to safe, legal abortion, and access to childcare.

Concluding with a quote from Marx, Beauvoir agreed with the need for genuinely equal relationships between men and women

so that women could flourish as human beings.

Many women identified with the problems and situations Beauvoir described. However, despite speaking widely on the subject, she did not actively campaign over these issues until the rise of the French women's movement in the early 1970s.

The catalyst for what Beauvoir would describe as her "radical feminism" appears to have been the protests of 1968. Her changing views are documented in a series of interviews with fellow feminist Alice Schwarzer. Beauvoir was primarily writing *Old Age*, her book on society's treatment of the elderly, during the protests and did not take a particularly active role in events.

However, conversations with her biographer Deirdre Bair in 1984 reveal that the sexism female activists had encountered from some male protesters heavily influenced her own re-evaluation of the importance of women's issues within the wider framework of socialist politics.

In the 1970s Beauvoir joined demonstrations for the right to legal abortion and publicly declared – alongside 342 other women – that she had undergone

an illegal abortion. This act of solidarity is one way in which Beauvoir used her public position to further the case of women's rights.

It took until 1975 for women in France to win the right to legal abortion in the first ten weeks of pregnancy.

Beauvoir also campaigned for unburdening women of childcare and housework, championed access to free contraception and demanded shelters for domestic abuse cases. *Les Temps Modernes* also started a column entitled "Everyday Sexism".

Although Beauvoir's position would gradually adjust itself over time, she never appears to have consistently adopted the separatist tactics of some within the women's movement.

She was against the idea of a specific political party for women and condemned ideas within the movement which argued liberation could be achieved by embracing an alternative interpretation of "the feminine".

By 1972, in a conversation with Schwarzer, it was clear that she was also dismissive of individual women's choice as the solution to women's oppression: "Liberation on an individual level is not enough. There must be a collective struggle, at the level of the class struggle too."

"Women fighting for women's liberation cannot be truly feminist without being part of the left, because even though socialism is not sufficient to guarantee the equality of the sexes, it is still necessary."

Beauvoir and her work were not always well received by the women's movement. *The Second Sex* was criticised as having a narrow perspective on women's situation and a middle class bias.

Some feminists saw her understanding of women's emancipation as a demand for women to assume traditionally male characteristics. For others her critique of women's oppression appeared to offer no concrete answers to the problem.

There are flaws in Beauvoir's work. She would later recognise some of these herself. For example, she told her biographer, "If I were to write *The Second Sex* today I should provide a materialistic, not an idealistic, theoretical foundation for [women's] oppression."

She never expanded on this topic, however, so it is difficult to assess how far her analysis had developed.

Many of Beauvoir's ideas remain relevant. Sexism and the "myth of the feminine" continue to exist, albeit sometimes in a different form from Beauvoir's time.

Sadly today Beauvoir is often only mentioned within the context of her relationship with Sartre.

Her work and life should act as a reminder to us about how vigilant we must continue to be in challenging all forms of oppression in our fight for a better world.

Revisionism revisited



By PAUL O'BRIEN

Roy Foster: *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change, 1970-2000.*

THIS SLIM collection of lectures repackaged to catch the Christmas market, attempts to explain how in the past thirty years the Celtic Tiger has transformed Irish society.

Roy Foster who is professor of history at Oxford University has a good style and turn of phrase, and an eye for amusing moments or events that provide the backdrop to his account of modern Ireland.

However, what is lacking in this book is any theoretical base, economic or social, to explain the dramatic changes in Irish society over the last three decades.

Instead we are left with a series of anecdotes that purport to illustrate these dramatic structural changes.

Foster's book is the intellectual equivalent of David McWilliams's "breakfast-roll man" for the middle-classes.

Foster's technique is to highlight defining moments in history, such as the arrest of supermarket owner Ben Dunne during an incident in Florida, which involved cocaine and prostitution in 1992, as a transformative moment in recent Irish history.

The global appeal of Irish popular culture is invoked as part of the modernising project of the ruling class.

But despite a nod towards the Derry band The Undertones, Foster's grasp of music rarely strays out of the mainstream.

His obsequious critique of the cultural relevance of Bono and Bob Geldorf is in contrast to his dismissal of Shane MacGowan of The Pogues and the traditional singer Mary Black, for their support for Irish cultural and nationalist values.

Over the last three decades a vigorous and at times vicious debate has taken place in Irish historiography.

Against the background of the troubles in Northern Ireland a school of history developed that divorced history from its broader

political and cultural setting.

Roy Foster has been at the centre of the attempt by the revisionists to establish what Diarmid Ferriter has called "a framework of historical interpretation based on history as a morality tale of right and wrong".

The vogue for memoir, such as *Angel's Ashes*, has internalised historical memory, dis-integrating the distinction between public and private, the individual and the masses.

This school of history rejects the possibility of locating any patterns in history that can explain the present in a meaningful way.

The debate in Ireland echoed what was happening internationally.

Materialist interpretations of history have been on the defensive internationally since the 1970s.

Revisionist historians deny any sense of an objective past reality or the Enlightenment principles of rights or progress.

Two elements are common to the revisionist history project, first a displacement of causes and consequences away from the long-term and social dimension, to the short-term accidental or political.

Second a resurgence of totalitarianism as a theoretical framework to explain mass movements and revolutions. An exploration of identity or gender is substituted - emotions, accidents, are highlighted as the motor of history - arbitrary conjunctions that dislocate social or political life.

Foster is part of a trend in historical writing that was influenced by the assumption that there is no alternative to the market - "history has ended" - capitalism has won out. Seen from this perspective the impact of revolution or mass agitation seems irrelevant and therefore can be defined in a narrow political way that emphasises its irrationality and its potential for violence and totalitarianism.

Revisionism in Ireland has been part of a strategy of containment, a protective shield that concealed the reality of Irish life that has colonised the media, particularly RTE and the Irish Independent.

This culminated in the fawning reception given to Roy Foster's "Modern Ireland" when it was published in 1988, and for ten years or more it was presented as the standard work on modern Irish history.

However we should avoid exaggerating their influence or accord them greater coherence than they in fact possess.

The debate has moved on. Revisionism is being challenged by a historical writing that has displaced much of the distortions that Foster and his cohorts have engendered, and is engaged with the attempt to understand and transform the world we live in.

Lupe Fiasco's *The Cool*

by YURI PRASAD

PROOF, IF more were needed, that hip-hop has moved decisively away from the vacuous "bling" phase, comes in the form of Lupe Fiasco.

His album *The Cool* paints a picture of today's US and its obsessions with superstar celebrities, and contrasts it with the lives of the poor, immigrants, drug users and petty criminals.

Musically, Lupe has moved away from tried-and-tested beats in favour of a darker, more synthesised, sound. This is particularly true of "Hello Goodbye", in which Lupe assumes the voice of a war veteran driven mad.

"Intruder Alert" charts the lives of immigrants trying to reach the West, while "Streets On Fire" speaks about Aids through the voices of those finding excuses not to take the disease's threat seriously.

By the end of the album, Lupe Fiasco has boiled down the world's richest country to a series of conflicts and tensions - any one of which is just waiting to explode.



■ Lupe Fiasco's *The Cool* Lupe Fiasco, Atlantic Records CD out now

DUBLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

SOCIALIST WORKER recommendations for the Dublin International Film Festival

Battle in Seattle

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16th, 11am. Savoy 1

The protests that confronted the leaders of the World Trade Organization when they meet in Seattle in 1999 gave birth to a whole new global political movement, anti-capitalism. Stuart Townsend's feature debut as director follows multiple fictional storylines about the people involved in the protest, from the mayor and the police, to the thousands of people who protested from around the world.

Happy-Go-Lucky

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21st, 9pm. Cineworld 17

Left-wing filmmaker Mike Leigh (*Vera Drake* and *Life is Sweet*) will introduce his new comedy *Happy-Go-Lucky*. The film stars Sally Hawkins as a good-hearted primary-school teacher living in modern London. The film will be followed by an interview with the director himself.

There Will be Blood

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16th, 7pm. Savoy 1

Even before it was released *There will be Blood* was being taunted by critics as one of the great American films of all times. Heard it all before? Yes, but this time there is one crucial difference, they're right. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, it stars Daniel Day-Lewis as an increasingly deranged oilman. Day-Lewis performance is intoxicatingly brilliant and in the words of one critic "redefines the parameters of cinema acting". Believe the hype.

Battle for Haditha



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23rd, 11am. Savoy 1

Another must-see has to be Nick Broomfield's *Battle for Haditha*. This is Broomfield's first film since his powerful and moving docudrama about the cockle-pickers' tragedy in Morecambe Bay. This time he turns his attention to war in Iraq. In 2005, after a roadside bomb killed one marine and injured two others, US soldiers decided to extract their terrible revenge on a nearby community. This brutal act became known as the My Lai massacre and four marines were subsequently charged with murder. Broomfield uses a hand-held camera and eye-witness accounts to offer a powerful insight into the day-to-day reality of the war on terror.

Eden



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24th, 8pm. Savoy 1

The festival's closing film is the premier of Declan Recks's film version of Eugene O'Brien's play about the slow disintegration of the relationship between a young couple in claustrophobic Irish town. *Eden* manages to sidestep many of the clichés associated with traditional Ireland and create instead an unflinching portrait of the difficulties of long-term relationships.

Dublin on Screen

FROM SATURDAY, February 16th. Various venues/times

In an attempt to bring the Dublin Film Festival out into the community, the festival have joined forces with Dublin Library Services to present a programme celebrating the city's cinemas. Filmmakers, politicians and critics, in their local libraries, will discuss the importance of a nearby picture-house. The season begins in Pearse Street Library Administration Headquarters with academic Dr Kevin Rockett, Sunniva O'Flynn of the Irish Film Archive and Neil Connolly, administrator of the Lighthouse Cinema, on city-centre cinemas.

One year on:

Turn the heat up on the Assembly

By SEAN MITCHELL

THE PRESSURE is being turned up on the Northern Ireland assembly, as people react to the neo liberal agenda being imposed on them, by politicians who promised an "assembly for the people".

The Assembly has had close to a year to deliver. With the staged managed photo opportunities drying up, and the perpetual talk of "historic" moments becoming tiresome, politicians are being exposed for the policies that they really stand for.

Introducing the budget in the Assembly, Finance minister Peter Robinson declared "the days of labour priorities are over".

Elsewhere his DUP colleague, Iris Robinson, praised the "radical right wing agenda" of the Budget.

Robinson and his executive colleagues have decided that the main priority of the assembly should be protecting big business, giving it a many concessions as possible.

However there is no protection for workers when businesses decided their

money has been made. Hundreds of Jobs in Limavady, and millions of pounds of public money were lost when Seagat decided to take itself elsewhere.

But opposition is beginning to emerge against the assembly. 2008 has already seen many protests against the government. Hundreds of people from the "loyalist" Village protested against poor housing conditions. They were joined by people from "Nationalist" West Belfast.

The very next week 150 turned up to a meeting to discuss saving youth worker jobs in Belfast. This was cross community and had trade union support.

It's not just on economic issues that the assembly is being pressured. A hastily built picket, supporting a woman's right to choose, gained considerable support amongst activists and workers.

Campaigns are sprouting up all over the place. We need to link them, in a united fight against the assembly. It is in that struggle that better future can be built.

For full reports on all the campaigns turn to page 3.



Executive proceeds with water privatisation

By EAMONN MCCANN

DESPITE THE propaganda of the Executive parties, privatisation of water in the North is proceeding.

Take one example: An outfit called Glen Water has been appointed by NI Water to deliver the £122 million "Project Omega." Under the project, the company will run 20 percent of the North's waste-water treatment capacity and 100 percent of disposal needs—operations which were integral elements of the publicly-owned water service until the Executive rubber-stamped privatisation.

Glen Water is a "joint venture" between Veolia and Laing O'Rourke. Veolia is the French-based multinational which thwarted its Italian rival, Enel, to buy Thames Water from

the Australian conglomerate Macquarie which had acquired it from its German owners, RWE. Laing O'Rourke is the biggest construction company in Britain.

Glen Water has hired Danish consultancy group Grontmij at a cost of £40 million to "certify the quality and value of work carried out by Glen Water."

These vast sums will be paid from the public purse to private companies via water charges—which are not being abolished but paid by a different method.

Privatisation or what?

But isn't the main company, NI Water still owned the Minister for Regional Development?

Yes. But that doesn't mean it's in

the public sector. What determines the character of a company is its system of commercial governance. NI Water is incorporated under company law, its management are legally required to make strategic decisions to the interests of the company itself and its shareholder(s)—not in the public interest. For all practical purposes, NI Water is a private company.

Money raised from water charges (now to be collected along with rates, rather than through separate bills) will be able to use it for public purposes—to build homes, for example, or as collateral for borrowing for road building. It won't be the Executive's money, but NI Water's money.

It's argued by all the main parties that, despite all this, the amount we

pay under the new system will be substantially less than under the old system. But the figures used to back this argument up are dodgy.

There'll be lower bills "for around 60 percent of households, those with a capital value of £110,000 or less," it's officially estimated. This is based on house prices in January 2005.

Last year, the University of Ulster estimated the average house price in the North at £240,408. Seventy percent of houses sold last year went for £150,000-£300,000. And prices have continued to soar. Commented the Guardian: "To say Northern Ireland has been the UK's property hotspot does it a disservice; it's the property hotspot of Europe."

But by 2010 and the next valuation, the charges, based on house prices, will

bear no resemblance whatever to the figures now being used by Regional Development Minister Conor Murphy.

What's more: the water charges are to be treated similarly with the rates as far as relief for the wealthy is concerned. The same £400,000 cap will apply.

But those who don't pay rates because they're on benefits of living on poverty pay will still have to cough up for water charges.

The better-off will get rates-style relief. The poorly-off won't.

The fact that bills will be included with the rates will make it more difficult to organise non-payment. That's the purpose of the new scheme.

Trade union meetings and meetings of the non-payment campaigns are under way to meet this new challenge.



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