

From Gaza to Iraq: STOP THE SLAUGHTER!

5 years since US-led invasion of Iraq
WORLD AGAINST WAR
 Demonstrate 15th March
 Assemble 3.00pm Parnell Square, Dublin
 Called by the Irish Anti War Movement

By **RICHARD BOYD BARRETT**,
 Chair of the Irish Anti-War
 Movement

FIVE YEARS on from the invasion of Iraq, the terrible cost of war is now apparent.

Palestine

In Palestine, we see the utter hypocrisy of all the talk by the US and its allies about bringing democracy to the Middle East.

Israel is unleashing a massacre in Gaza (see full report page 6).

The international community, led by the US and supported by the EU has backed Israel in imposing a boycott on the entire Palestinian population because they elected an Islamic Party, Hamas, in fully free and fair elections.

This collective punishment of a civilian population is a war crime under International law, yet the Israeli Supreme Court has upheld the right of the Israeli military to continue the siege of Gaza and Ireland and the EU has remained silent.

Iraq

Opinion Research Business, a British polling firm recently estimated that 1.2 million Iraqi's have been killed.

4.2 million Iraqis (almost 20 per cent of the Iraqi population) have been made refugees as a result of the war and occupation.

US bombing raids, usually in civilian areas, have increased by 500 per cent in 2007 from the previous year and continues today.

The reality of the US "surge" is that the number of Iraqi's fleeing their homes has jumped dramatically. In the first month of the "surge" the number of people being displaced reached 100,000 and the flood has continued.

The war has cost \$494 billion and is costing \$275 million per day. The annual cost of the war would pay for healthcare for 39 million Americans.

Afghanistan
 There are five times more bombing



raids going on in Afghanistan than in Iraq. The result is that 1,600 Afghans have been killed in the last four months. Tens of thousands have died since the war began.

There are now 3 million Afghan refugees living in tents around the main cities.

Life expectancy and literacy rates have fallen since the invasion despite all the US/NATO propaganda about "reconstruction and "nation-building."

30 per cent of the population have no access to clean water and 1 in 8 children dies as a result. 1 in 5 children dies before the age of 5.

Global Permanent War

As if all this is not bad enough, the US continues to crank up the rhetoric and threats of war against Iran. The US and Israel are also backing forces in Lebanon that

are trying to ferment another civil war after Israel's failed attempt to invade the country a year ago, which claimed the lives of over one thousand men, women and children.

The US are also stirring up a new cold war and arms race with Russia by locating its new missile defence shield in central Europe, which has in turn prompted Russia to develop a new nuclear missile system.

Irish Complicity in War

Bertie Ahern's government, now supported by the Greens have allowed one million US troops and countless CIA torture flights through Shannon airport, destroying Irish neutrality and making Ireland complicit with imperialist warmongering.

Ahern now wants to take this even further by committing

Irish troops to support the French military that are propping up a corrupt and brutal regime in Chad – a regime that is up to its neck in the civil war in Darfur that has claimed the lives of 200,000 Sudanese people.

This is why five years on from the US invasion of Iraq it is vital that people in Ireland continue to join people marching against war in the US, Britain and across the world.

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Council hands over bin service to private firm



The shape of things to come: Privatised bin trucks

By RICHARD BOYD BARRETT

DUN LAOGHAIRE-RATHDOWN Co Council want to wind down the Council bin collection and hand it over to private operators like Panda and Greenstar.

They have already removed eight council bin trucks from service and are now planning to remove more.

They are refusing to collect the bins from householders who haven't registered a name to be billed.

The Council even sold

wheelie bins to PANDA at €1 each, while a householder who has to buy a new bin from the Council will be charged €45. This is a direct corporate subsidy with taxpayer's money.

In Wicklow, once the Council service was shut down private companies like Greenstar massively increased their charges and they continue to rise every year. Private companies will also do away with any waiver system for pensioners and those on social welfare.

However, there are still thousands of householders across Dublin and Dun

Laoghaire that are refusing to pay the bin tax. Many residents are throwing their own rubbish into the back of the Council lorries - which they are legally entitled to do.

Charges and privatisation have been a disaster for the environment. Since bin charges were introduced and waste services were privatised in most parts of the country, dumping and burning of rubbish has massively increased. One quarter of all domestic waste nationally is unaccounted for.

We need a national recycling infrastructure that makes recycling free and

easy. This should be paid for through a just taxation system not on charges that hurt the less well off to line the pockets of private companies.

We also need to tax industry and big business that are the main producers of waste and stop them from putting unnecessary packaging on their products.

The public should remember that all the main political parties - Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, the PD's, Greens and Labour have voted to make you pay bin charges and are supporting the privatisation of waste collection.

Empty properties but thousands still waiting on the housing list

By HUGH LEWIS

THE CENTRAL Statistics Office recently released figures showing that there are over 220,000 empty houses and apartments in the country, including over 2000 in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown.

But 4,000 people are on the council housing list in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown who have to wait up to eight years to be housed. Developers will sit on the empty properties while people that really need

them still cannot afford a home.

Local residents in Dun Laoghaire lodged over 300 objections to the first phase of the proposed development at the Golf Club but the Council showed its contempt for the wishes of local people and approved it anyway.

Now An Bord Pleanála has refused to grant a public oral hearing for the appeal on the Council's decision. The Bord is claiming that the development is not

important enough to justify an oral hearing, even though huge numbers of the public want to have their say.

Cosgrave developers are proposing to build 3000 mostly private apartments and houses at the Golf Club. This is the size of a major town and will put impossible pressure on local infrastructure. There are similar objections to another development in Shankill.

Whether in Dun

Laoghaire or Shankill, housing development should be matched to the actual needs of the community and should not be approved without adequate provision of local amenities, facilities, public transport and road infrastructure.

Instead of building huge new private developments that we don't want or need, the government and Council need to provide social and affordable housing and amenities for those that do need them.

Dun Laoghaire seafront kept public

By RICHARD BOYD BARRETT

ALMOST TWO years after thousands of residents joined Save Our Seafront protests to stop high-rise apartments being built on the site of Dun Laoghaire baths, the Council have finally produced new proposals for the baths site.

Following the public protests, the Council were forced to abandon their plans to privatise the Baths site and contracted Marine Engineering Consultants, Royal Haskoning, to examine the options for restoring the Baths as a public amenity

and have now proposed two options to the Council for the redevelopment of the site.

Neither have a privatised high-rise or apartment development and that both

proposals are focused on providing public seafront amenities. This is a major victory for people power. Until we protested the Council and all the major parties on the council were adamant that a fully public amenity was "unrealistic." One councillor even called us "mad."

The public must be properly involved in finalising the plans for the baths and seafront. We must also keep up the pressure to ensure that we are not waiting another two years before work to restore the baths site as a public swimming amenity actually starts.

Battle for St Michaels continues

By MELISA HALPIN

DEVELOPER, NOEL Smyth, has appealed to An Bord Pleanála following the Council's decision to reject his application to build an eight-storey apartment complex on the car-park of St Michael's Hospital in Dun Laoghaire.

If An Bord Pleanála allow the development it will put pressure on the hospital to sell the hospital itself. Smyth has already made approaches to the hospital management to purchase the hospital.

The Council rejected Smyth's application at the end of last year after major public pressure and protests demanding that the hospital be retained and upgraded at its current location.

Galway Against Guantanamo

By KIRAN EMRICH

THE SWP in Galway alongside Galway Alliance Against War and Amnesty International organised Ruhul Ahmed, a former detainee of Guantanamo, to speak in the Galway last month.

Ruhul and two friends, also from Tipton in England, spent two years in Guantanamo after being abducted in Afghanistan following a family wedding in Pakistan.

40 people attended in NUIG and later 70 at a meeting in the city centre. The event was the biggest

event of Human Rights Awareness Week in the university.

We also promoted a bus to the World Against War demo in Dublin.

We also organised a series of 3 documentary evenings to commemorate the 5th anniversary of the global Anti-War protests in 2003 including a film about Guantanamo.

The aim was to raise awareness about the illegal detention of over 700 prisoners since 2001 and support through a campaign of postcards "Send hope from Galway" to the Guantanamo detainees.

Nazi organiser invited to UCC



David Irving with former Nazi armaments minister Albert Speer

By JOE MOORE

FOR THE third time in 15 years, students in the UCC Philosophical Society have invited convicted Holocaust denier and Nazi organiser, David Irving, to address one of their meetings.

The debate is due to take place on Monday 10th March in the Boole complex on the campus.

The topic he will be speaking on is Freedom of Speech.

Irving received his first invite from this society, back in 1993.

The meeting however did not go ahead as college security staff, members of SIPTU, withdrew their labour on the night.

On the second occasion, November 1999, a protest of over 600 people succeeded in having the meeting called off.

The "Stop Irving Campaign" is calling on all decent people to contact the college authorities and the Philosophical Society to demand they withdraw the invitation to Irving.

If this demand falls on deaf ears, then the Campaign is calling on all anti fascists, from around the country to gather at the main UCC entrance on the Western Road at 6.30 on Monday 10th March, so that we can ensure by people power, that there will be no platform for fascists in Cork.

Cherry Orchard resists DCC building plans

By ALICE MAHON

DUBLIN CITY Council have put forward plans to build in excess of 4,000 housing units in a local park, Orchard Park, in the Cherryorchard area of Ballyfermot.

At a meeting held at the end of February organised by Orchard Lawns Community Group Brid Smith from People Before Profit proposed that there should be an Environmental Impact Study carried out on all of Ballyfermot.

It was also agreed that all of the communities in Cherryorchard be invited to a meeting to develop a strategy on how to force Dublin City Council to take the needs of the

communities affected by this development into consideration.

Local residents proposed that posters be placed on the railings of the park to draw attention to the issue. Further actions such as a protest outside the DCC offices in Ballyfermot and mass leafleting of the area were also agreed.

Residents demanded an inquiry into the sham consultation of the plans by the council.

The lack of democracy and local representation was condemned and the promises of two of the local councillors were greeted with scepticism. Residents are determined to use people power to force DCC to listen to them.

WATER CHARGES

No way – We STILL won't pay

By GORETTI HORGAN

NORTHERN IRELAND Water Ltd has announced it wants to take £20 million more a year from households in water charges. It's now clear that Sinn Féin and the DUP are intent on imposing water charges.

All the parties promised in the course of the last election said that they would not bring in water charges. These were hollow promises. Minister Conor Murphy tried to present himself as on the side of those who he wants to pay water charges. Part of his spin has been to say that people have made it clear they are willing to pay for upgrading the water and sewage system (they haven't) as long as it's a fair charge.

What people clearly said, and voted for, is to pay ONLY through general taxation. The advantage of this is that people would pay according to their ability to pay and paying for water through general taxation would make it clear that water is not a commodity like electricity or gas but a necessity of life.

In an attempt to avoid the blame for bringing in water charges after promising that they wouldn't, the Executive set up an 'Independent Panel' to look at water charges and at how to make them more popular. The Independent Panel seemed to get the message that people are not willing to pay separate water charges and recommended that they be collected via the rates bills. However,

it has since become clear that there will be separate water charges and these will be listed separately on each rates bill.

Further, water will be considered a separate utility charge and, therefore, not liable to relief and rebate as are the rates. Rather, there is a proposal to develop an 'affordability tariff' for low-income households. We saw in earlier proposals that there is nothing affordable about 'affordability' tariffs; rather they will cause real hardship for households living on low incomes.

And while those at the bottom of society will not get any of the benefits of paying via their rates bills, those at the top will – the £400,000 cap on the capital value of houses, on which rates bills are calculated, will remain in place for water charges.

As the recent BBC documentary 'Diamonds and the dole' highlighted, for those living solely on benefits the introduction of any additional charges will push a lot of people further into poverty. An Assembly Committee has even admitted that, despite even if the proposed 'affordability tariff' is introduced, 11% of Northern Ireland households can expect to live in water poverty should the charges come into effect.

It's clear that the fight against water charges will have to continue. Anyone interested in joining Communities Against the Water Tax can phone 07973528772, or email info@niapn.org

100 attend Liberties redevelopment meeting

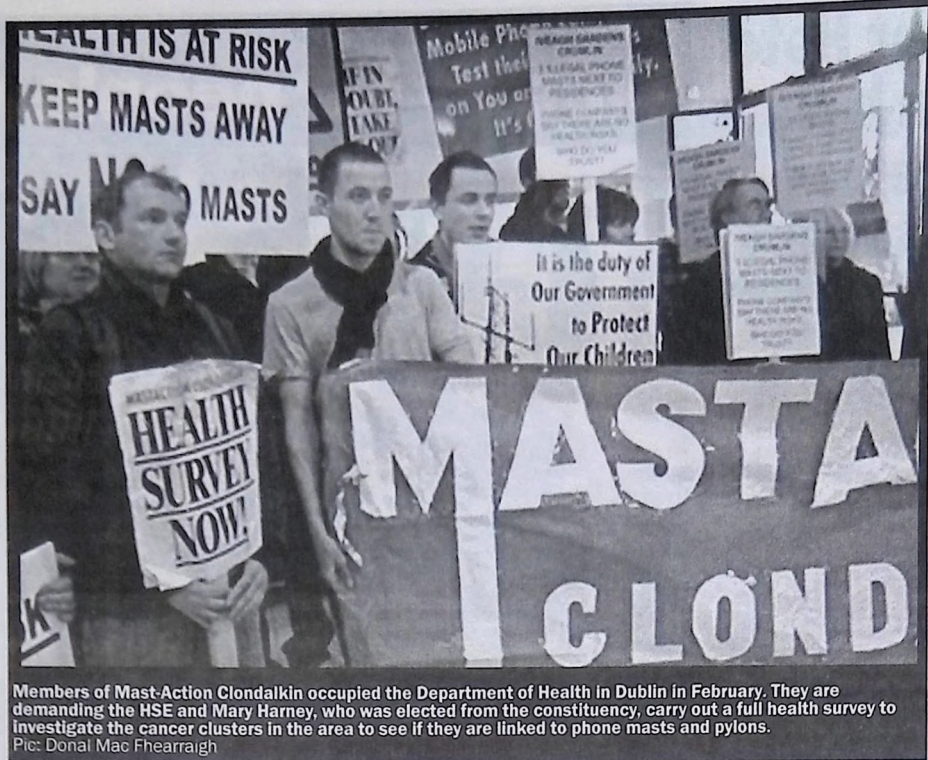
by ROISIN RYDER

DUBLIN CITY Council is drawing up an area framework plan for the Liberties area. People are fearful because of what happened in the Cork St area where the redevelopment was driven by profiteers and not for people's needs.

The Liberties Development Action Group was formed after a public meeting of over 100 people hosted by People Before Profit. There is a growing concern that

the local community will be excluded from the important decisions. When DCC were asked how public amenities and suggestions were going to be paid for it was said that it would be done through 'equity release'. Roughly translated this means the selling off of public land.

We aim to make sure that the development of the Liberties is for the benefit of local people and not developers.



Members of Mast-Action Clondalkin occupied the Department of Health in Dublin in February. They are demanding the HSE and Mary Harney, who was elected from the constituency, carry out a full health survey to investigate the cancer clusters in the area to see if they are linked to phone masts and pylons. Pic: Donal Mac Fhearraigh

Tesco cashes in on Digital Divide

By NIAL SMYTH

THE CAMPAIGN for Commercial-Free Education has condemned Tesco's 'Computers for Schools' voucher scheme as exploitative and discriminatory and said it will further widen the gap between rich and poor schools as highlighted on last week's Prime Time programme.

The Campaign of teachers and parents has rubbished Tesco's claim that primary schools receive "Free" Computing Equipment and called for equal access to ICT

for all children irrespective of their spending power.

According to the 2007 Tesco Computers for Schools Catalogue parents will have to spend a vast sum of money to get basic equipment.

■ Basic Desktop PC (rrp €525) = €232,400 worth of receipts.

■ R40 Samsung Laptop (rrp €758) = €348,500 worth of receipts.

■ Basic Samsung Digital Camera (price €58.79) = €31,900 worth of shopping.

C a m p a i g n f o r Commercial-Free Education

Chairperson Mr. Joseph Fogarty said "Tesco wish to capitalise on the fact that schools in the Republic have had no government funding whatsoever towards the purchase or maintenance of computers for five years. Desperate schools are tempted to do the work of company promoters and advertise Tesco to children as young as 4. Such schemes widen the "Digital Divide" between richer schools and smaller or poorer schools who cannot generate the massive revenues."

The launch of the scheme

in the Republic coincides with 20,000 new laptops being delivered to schools in Northern Ireland under a programme being rolled out by the Department of Education there.

The Campaign's position echoes INTO policy that schools should be free from proof of purchase incentive schemes while the Irish Primary Principals Network also strongly recommends that Principals do not participate in voucher redemption schemes which use children as marketing agents.

US Military tests space weapons over Ireland

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

THE U.S. military announced plans in mid-February to shoot down a 5,000-pound spy satellite by firing a missile into space.

News reports in Ireland focused on the possibility of debris falling in Ireland. But it had much more sinister undertones.

According to a New York Times report, "The effort will be a real-world test of the nation's anti-ballistic missile systems and its anti-satellite abilities, even though the Pentagon said it was not using the effort to test its most exotic weapons or send a message to any adversaries."

A few weeks ago Bush criticised China for shooting down one of its

own satellites in a test of an anti-satellite missile.

Therefore this 'test' represents a major escalation in the space-weapons race.

The U.S. continues to refuse to sign onto any treaties banning space weapons.

During the Cold War, the U.S. and Russia carried out about 50 anti-satellite tests.

Now, the U.S. sees itself as leading the race to weaponise space. Hence, in the words of New York Times reporter Thom Shanker, "The United States has resisted suggestions that a new arms-control regime be negotiated to govern space weapons, and has asserted its sovereign right to defend its own access to space and to deny it to others in future wars."



Over 100 members of Dublin's Palestinian community who protested at the Spire over renewed Israeli attacks on Gaza after Israel's deputy defense minister Matan Vilnai threatened Palestinians in Gaza with a "holocaust". Pic: Donal Mac Fhearraigh

HSE cuts homeless funding

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

THE VOLUNTARY Network of homeless services in Dublin, a network of 23 organisations working to tackle and prevent homelessness in Dublin, has criticised the HSE for cutting their funding.

It means that the Government target of ending long-term homelessness by 2010 cannot now be reached.

The situation for homeless people has worsened in recent weeks. Currently up to 100 people per night can't access emergency accommodation and have to sleep rough.

The Homeless Network said it knows of at least 60 such applications from NGOs that will now not receive any funding. The lack of funding to cover essential staff costs means that one brand new long-term accommodation project to be run by Depaul trust will be unable to open its doors as planned. This project would have provided 30 homes and help to move people on from emergency accommodation thus making more beds available in the emergency system.

Also, a new homeless service in Middle Abbey St., designed to address the issue of people who are homeless congregating on the boardwalk has also been denied funds for running costs despite funding having previously been approved and a building provided (refurbished and fitted) by Dublin City Council.

The Homeless Network maintains the lack of move on accommodation in the form of social housing has led to the situation where some people are forced to stay in emergency accommodation on a long term basis. This has helped lead to an emergency accommodation system recently unable to fully cope with the fluctuation in demand for beds that can happen.

Meanwhile the HSE continues to pay Brendan Drumm and an army of HSE managers salaries of hundreds of thousands of euros who do nothing except cut needed health posts and services for the most vulnerable in society.

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

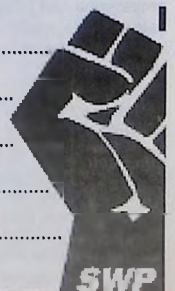
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Banquet for Hotel Federation but workers denied 22 cent increase

By KIERAN ALLEN

WHEN THE Irish Hotel Federation celebrated a gala dinner in Kilkenny castle at the end of February, they were met by an angry SIPTU protest. Fifty union activists demonstrated outside the gates of the castle shouting 'The Workers United: will never be defeated'.

The buses carrying the hotel owners could not drive into the castle and their passengers were forced to get out and walk through protestors who shouted 'Shame, Shame, Shame'. It was small sign of what is coming as the union gets ready to tackle an employers' organisation that has trampled on workers rights.

Last year, the owner of the Vaughan Lodge Hotel in Lahinch, Co Clare and the IHF opened a High Court case against the statutory minimum wage for the industry.

Ever since 1946, minimum wages are set by the Hotels Joint Labour Committee and these are slightly higher than the national minimum wage.

Last November an increase that averaged 22 cents an hour was awarded to hotel workers.

It was too much for the IHF who screamed that it would make them 'uncompetitive'. Their legal case was that state regulation was an interference with their property rights.

They only settled the High Court case recently because the Employment Regulation Order granting the extra 22 cents was deferred.

This lavish increase cannot be backdated – so the skiffins in the hotel industry have already saved costs.

The hotel industry is a substantial beneficiary of EU and state aid. It has received €46.2 million in EU Regional Development Funds plus extra VAT refunds from the government since 2007.

But while it has no problem taking hand outs, it objects to state interference to help its workers.

One third of workers in the hotel industry are migrant workers and many are employed on short term contracts.

We need a big unionisation drive in this sector and Irish Ferries style protests if the Irish Hotel Federation makes any further attacks on its workforce.

Belfast Village: Victory for people power



Residents of the Village area of Belfast won a major victory after a long battle over much needed redevelopment of the housing in their area. Many houses dating from the Victorian era have no central heating. Many elderly people have to live without electricity or running water and only have the use of an outside toilet.

Margaret Ritchie, NI Social Development Minister, announced an Immediate 7 million fund with a further 100 million to follow to improve the terrible housing conditions.

However, this move only came after years of protests and demonstrations by residents of the village. It's a major victory for people power.

Margaret Couchman, secretary of the Greater Village Housing Focus Group, said "After all these years of fighting and protesting and trying to get a decent standard of living for people here we just can't believe something is finally happening".

"I just can't wait to go to the homes of these elderly people who are living in a house with no heating in this freezing weather to tell them they don't have long to wait" — Donal Mac Fhearraigh

200 attend meeting on agency workers rights



Recent protest over exploitation of agency workers

by JOE MOORE, CORK

A CROWD of over 200 people attended a meeting in Cork, organised by SIPTU, to highlight the plight of Agency Workers.

More and more employers are moving away from hiring direct employees and instead using employment agencies to provide them with staff.

Agency workers are paid well below the agreed rates of pay, particularly in the construction and catering industries.

Workers are also denied many statutory rights, and do not have holiday and pension entitlements.

This of course increases profits for the bosses

The meeting was attended Junior Minister for Labour Affairs, Billy Kelleher, T.D. who stated that the Government had no intention of implementing the EU Directive which would give a degree of protection to these workers.

Ireland is one of only three countries refusing to agree this Directive.

Although this campaign is a welcome initiative from SIPTU, to be successful it needs to mobilise workers in all industries, both in the workplaces and on the streets.

Novum: This is what trade unionism should look like

By KIERAN ALLEN

SIPTU MEMBERS at the Novum plant on the Clonsaugh industrial estate in the Coolock area of Dublin have been on strike for six weeks to defend an important union employment principle: Last In, First Out.

At the time of going to press Novum management looked like they were about to accept the union's demands.

The company imposed lay-offs but instead of abiding by the older fairer principle, it wanted to pick and choose who to retain and who to let go.

In one case a worker who been at the plant for 35 years was let go while someone who was employed for six months was retained.

The unions concluded a Temporary Worker Agreement with the company in 1993 which governed lay offs – but the company seems determined to break it.

The company has recently opened a non-union plant

in Roscommon so it may be embarking on a strategy to weaken the union at the Dublin plant.

The workers at Novum have shown a determination that is a model for trade unionists throughout the country.

They have built a strong union at plant level and have stood up for the temporary workers in the past.

Many of these migrant workers were being paid at the minimum wage

rate but pressure by the union saw their pay rates improve.

As a result, there is fantastic solidarity on the strike.

New workers whom the company wanted to keep on the pay roll have joined their colleagues on the picket line.

If the dispute continues every trade unionist should build solidarity for the strike

SIPTU: Vote Kieran Allen for General Secretary

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

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

He is also using his campaign to build support for workers struggles.

He is campaigning in support of agency workers and has been on protests organised by building workers and Hotel workers, as well as building solidarity for strikes like Novum in Dublin.

Kieran said, "SIPTU has gone too soft and needs to change. Benchmarking has failed to deliver in the public sector and restrictions on private sector workers putting in any 'cost-increasing' claims needs



Kieran Allen

to be challenged". 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.

Contact the campaign at 087 2839964 or kallen@iol.ie or www.kieranallen.org

Ireland's hidden workforce

By TONY AYTON, Ex International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) senior inspector dealing with maritime issues.

THE VALUE of Irelands exports and imports passing through our seaports is now in excess of €150 Billion per annum.

Unfortunately since Ireland owns only little more than a handful of merchant ships, over 90% of these goods are

handled by foreign owned ships.

Almost half of these foreign ships and almost all container ships trading into our seaports operate under what is known as the Flag of Convenience system.

This is a system where the true owners of the vessels distance themselves from the responsibility of being the owners of the vessels and from their responsibilities as the employers of the

crews. The result is all too often that the crews of these ships have pay and conditions that are greatly substandard and these unfortunate crews are often denied their most basic human and civil rights.

At this point in time the social partners in our country are again turning their attention to the subject of a new National Agreement and the question of workers rights and the

enforcement of same, is quite rightfully on the agenda.

I think it is time that the social partners, now also turned their attention to the question of the rights and entitlements of Irelands hidden workforce – the foreign seafarers who carry our vital exports to the marketplace and who bring in the vital imports without which our economy could not function.

EU wants to privatise Ireland's ambulance service



By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

AN ATTEMPT by the HSE to push through the privatisation of Ireland's ambulance service using EU laws was met with a strong response when the 1200 ambulance drivers voted 16 to one for industrial action at the end of February.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) claimed it was obliged to

initiate a tendering competition under EU regulations.

The workers were due to decide on what industrial action to take as Socialist Worker was going to press. A SIPTU spokesperson said that they would probably call for an all out strike to begin at the end of March.

The HSE and SIPTU were in negotiations when the HSE

went behind the unions back and advertised for contracts avoiding the usual channels to insure the union would not notice.

The HSE then went ahead and actually awarded three contracts to private companies.

The HSE claims that the contracts were for services such as ferrying patients between hospitals, but they would not give any

999 service would not be outsourced to private companies. A SIPTU spokesperson said "Given our treatment so far by the HSE in relation to this matter we can no longer take their word on maintaining a public ambulance service".

The case shows how the agenda behind the Lisbon Treaty can affect us in our everyday lives.

Irish leaders desperate tactics

By SINEAD KENNEDY

WITH MORE the 60 percent of the electorate still undecided the Yes campaign are resorting to increasingly desperate tactics with government ministers and business elites outdoing one another with doom-laden predictions. They are desperate not to argue on the substance of the Treaty.

However Johannes Laitenberger, the European Commission spokesperson,

was forced to admit that in legal terms the EU would continue to work exactly the same and that the consequences of rejecting the Treaty would be primarily felt on the political side.

Richard Boyd Barrett, said "The government's strategy is one of deliberately keeping the public ignorant and hoping to achieve a yes vote by attacking those on the NO side as anti-European. The treaty was deliberately written so as to be

"unreadable".

"The Treaty is particularly objectionable from the point of view of trade unionists and those concerned with issues like social inequality because it establishes economic rules for the EU that will oblige member states to privatise and introduce charges for essential public services. It also removes the national veto on changes in EU policy on key areas such as health and education making it easier for the EU elite to

de-regulate and privatise these services".

FF know that once the Irish electorate knows that ratification of Lisbon will mean further attacks on public services like health and education, the gradual incorporation of Ireland into a militarised Europe and the further erosion of our democratic rights, the Irish electorate will join the French and Dutch voters and reject this Treaty.

Vote NO meetings draw large attendance

SWP MEMBERS helped organise a series of successful meetings on the Lisbon Treaty in February.

Over 60 people attended a Vote NO meeting in Cork. 'Galway NO to Lisbon Treaty Campaign' was set up at a meeting that drew 70 people. A Vote NO meeting in Rialto, Dublin drew some twenty people.

A previous meeting in the same area drew 30. The People Before Profit Alliance hosted a lively meeting of over 20 people in Finglas, Dublin. Over 60 people came to a Vote NO launch meeting in Dun Laoghaire.

The Galway group are hosting a series of meetings. The first is in the Harbour

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

VoteNo.ie
Kieran Allen
ANOTHER EUROPE IS POSSIBLE

Hotel, Wednesday 19th March at 7.30pm, on "The Lisbon Treaty: Military Implications for Ireland".

Speakers from a wide range of organisations spoke at the meetings. They included the union UNITE, the Irish Anti War Movement, Sinn Fein, People Before Profit and the SWP. At all these meetings people volunteered to campaign once a date for the referendum was declared.

Sinead Kennedy who edits the VoteNo.ie website pointed out that many groups are working together on the campaign while using their own leaflets and pamphlets and that the VoteNo.ie website is a resource that all are free to use.

COMMENT

The EU-CAN Association Agreement: are the colonies back?

By JOSÉ ANTONIO GUTIÉRREZ, Research & Development Officer, LASC

SINCE THE end of the Cold War Europe has been trying to recover its former status as a world power.

Two major steps have been taken recently in that direction: first, the Lisbon Treaty which aims at centralising power in the hands of the EC; and secondly, a series of bi-regional agreements with the former area of European influence, in the form of Economic Partnership Agreements or EPAs, with Africa and the Caribbean, and the "Association Agreements" with Central America and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN -Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia). These AAs and EPAs, although dealing with three main areas of concern (political dialogue, cooperation and trade) are nothing but Free Trade agreements in disguise.

The EU-CAN Association Agreement currently at a negotiation stage pushes privatisation, free trade and market openings for water, energy and other services, in its own words, "beyond the WTO's basic rules". This agreement pushes an economic agenda that favours European companies while at the same time it declares itself to be "based on respect for and the promotion of human rights, democracy and good governance".

However, in the region there has been massive opposition to privatisation and numerous attempts by people's organisations to end it. The people have said, in all possible and unequivocal ways, that they do not desire basic services such as water to be privatised. The agreement, therefore, turns its back on the will of the people.

The document states that its intention is to "help create conditions for reducing poverty, promote decent work and more equitable access to social services, as well as ensure an appropriate balance between economic, social and environmental components in a sustainable development context". However, it also states its intention to "set out the conditions for the gradual establishment of a Free Trade Area between the two regions, and develop both intra- and bi-regional trade exchanges". Experience has shown that both objectives are contradictory.

As a consolation, we get a vague declaration of good will: "...taking into account different levels of development in the EU and in the Andean Community, region-to-region asymmetries may be considered, where necessary, in all trade and trade-related areas discussed in the course of negotiations, for instance by agreeing to different timings for transitional periods". However, the document goes on to say that "taking into account their levels of development, the Andean Community countries will be allowed a certain measure of flexibility in overall terms as well as in individual sectors and sub-sectors. Any transitional period should in principle not exceed 10 years".

But no clear indication is given about setting development milestones. This is all very telling of the Neoliberal agenda being veiled behind a humanist language.

This is all made even more vague and meaningless when we consider "the importance attached to the principles and rules which govern international trade, in particular under the auspices of the WTO, and to the need to apply them in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner will be underlined". This has been proved to run contrary to the development interests of the Global South. And also, it renders the point about asymmetries void of meaning. Especially because the strongest party in the negotiations - the EU - can claim any such a measure to be discriminatory.

Despite its rhetoric, it is clear that the EU-CAN Association Agreement will undermine the Andean people's efforts to regain democratic control of their economies and resources. But also, it advances a project of a Global Europe, outlined by the EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson: a Europe that is competitive in the global context - this can be read as a Europe of flexibility, precarity, out of the control of its citizens and to the service of a few business people gathered in ERT. The struggle against EU-CAN AA is actually in the interest of the people of the two regions.

In the face of a global offensive by TNCs and of the global resistance it's creating in many regions, particularly in Latin America, LASC believes it is necessary to strengthen cooperation between European and Latin American activists.

Links should be made to join efforts and to learn from each other. For that reason, in the upcoming Latin America Week, from the 7th to the 12th of April, we will have the opportunity to exchange with activists from Italy, Colombia, Ecuador and the Netherlands, who come to share their experience in fighting back water privatisation and building up community resistance and alternatives to the single-minded privatisation model. We welcome the participation of everyone in the events we are organising (visit www.lasc.ie for information) and in the campaign we are preparing against the EU-CAN AA.

COMMENT

Egypt: strikes shake US ally

by HOSSAM EL-HAMALAWY,
Egyptian journalist - arabist.net/ahamawy

Hosni Mubarak's regime is a key US ally in the Middle East. Last month hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip poured into Egypt after demolishing the border fence built by Israel. Mubarak had sealed the border as part of a US-Israeli siege on the Palestinian territory intended to destroy Hamas - the resistance movement that won the 2006 elections.

Attempts by Egyptian security forces to failed after they were confronted by Palestinians and resistance fighters.

Images of Egyptian riot police beating Palestinians were beamed across the Egypt, fuelling angry protests in the capital Cairo. Mubarak was forced to back down and begin negotiations with Hamas.

Now the struggle has shifted back into the Egyptian working class.

Workers at the Ghazi el-Mahalla textile mill in Egypt staged a mass demonstration last month calling for the end of the US-backed regime of Hosni Mubarak.

The textile mill is the biggest in the Middle East. Its 27,000-strong workforce has been instrumental in forcing the regime into making economic concessions.

In February the workers stormed out of their factory chanting, "Down, down Hosni Mubarak! Your rule is shit!" As they spilled out into the Nile Delta town they were joined by up to 10,000 local people.

The protest inside the factory began by demanding a rise in the national minimum wage. The demonstration was called the day before the National Council for Wages - the government body in charge of setting the minimum wage - was due to convene for the first time since the mid-1980s.

The minimum wage in Egypt has been held at £3.26 a month since 1984 - while inflation has rocketed. The workers are demanding the government raise the minimum wage to £112 a month.

The protest was organised in secret by left wing activists in the factory. Bosses called in police in riot gear. At this point the workers stormed the gates and drove them away.

They marched through the streets waving loaves of bread and chanting, "We are sick of eating beans while the rich eat chicken and pigeons." Others chanted against Mubarak's son and heir, "Gamal Mubarak, tell your dad we hate him!"

Kamal al-Fayoumi, a union organiser and activist in the unofficial textile workers' union, told the crowds, "We are demanding social justice for all workers in Egypt. We want all the resources shared equally between workers and peasants, and not for this government of businessmen."

Doctors in Egypt have also threatened to strike if their demands over pay are not met. They are the latest group to join a wave of popular unrest led by Egyptian workers and peasants.

Hamdy el-Sayyed, head of the Egyptian Doctors' Syndicate, "We want to offer a high standard of healthcare in Egypt," he said. "We don't want doctors to have to absent themselves from their hospital duties in order to run after work in [private] clinics."

The demonstration marks a deepening of the wave of industrial struggle that began in Ghazi el-Mahalla in December 2006.

That strike over bonuses set the standard for a wave of similar disputes, including those of rail workers, nurses, cement workers and tax collectors.

The latest protest also marks a shift in the tempo of the struggle. In previous disputes Mahalla workers fought over local economic demands and made appeals to Mubarak to intervene against factory bosses.

The chants against Mubarak and his family indicate a political crystallisation of the current movement. This demonstration was the first time since bread riots in 1977 that national demands have been raised in mass street demonstrations.

This current wave of struggle began with the pro-Palestinian demonstrations in 2000, which metamorphosed into 30,000 strong anti-war protests in Cairo on 20-21 March 2003.

The resistance to war and neoliberalism is transforming the movement for change inside the Middle East.

The Egyptian movement is organising the Sixth Cairo Conference on 27-30 March. This will bring together activists from across the globe to challenge war and neoliberalism.



By MATTHEW COOKSON

ISRAEL UNLEASHED terror on the Palestinian people of the Gaza Strip in March, when it launched a military operation including airstrikes.

It claimed it was attempting to stop the Hamas Islamist movement firing rockets into Israel, but its real aim is to crush the Palestinian people's resistance to their oppression.

Israel murdered over 100 Palestinians, the majority civilians, in the five day assault and injured over 350 people. In contrast, only three Israelis died, including two soldiers and one civilian.

As Israel "withdrew" from Gaza on the following Monday - just as US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice was about to arrive for a two-day visit - its leaders were already pledging further attacks on Gaza.

Prime minister Ehud Olmert said, "We are in the midst of a combat action. What happened was not a one off event."

Amjad Shawa, Palestinian NGO network coordinator for Gaza, and Mona el-Farra, a doctor at Al Awda hospital in Jabalia refugee camp, spoke to Socialist Worker.

"These have been very difficult days," said Amjad. "A huge number of people have been killed,

including women, children and disabled people. Many NGOs have been destroyed, such as those that supply medical relief.

"It was a massacre, with no mercy shown towards the children. They were killing our beautiful youth every day.

"People went three days without water during the attack. The 1.5 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip were already suffering from the Israeli siege that began in 2006.

Fuel shortage

"Now it's getting worse. We are spending most of the day without electricity. There is a shortage of fuel to operate water wells and run ambulances.

"Any new military operation will increase our problems. The Palestinians are facing a catastrophe."

Mona said, "Last Saturday the hospital received 69 injured people. These casualties were more than the capacity of the hospital's beds and two operating theatres. Many of the injured had to lie on the floor.

"We had to evacuate some of the injured people to another hospital. Some were left to bleed until they died because of a lack of resources.

"There is little electricity in the

Gaza Strip - blackouts are now the rule. The ministry of health is advising people to boil drinking water, as there is no chlorine to treat it. The health of people is deteriorating.

"On Monday everyone in Gaza went to funerals of those killed in the assault. The Israeli operation did not stop."

The attack on Gaza is the latest part of the US and Israel's plans to destroy Hamas. This month's issue of Vanity Fair magazine reveals how George Bush was outraged when Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in January 2006.

He launched a plan to get the Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah movement to prepare a coup against Hamas. This was foiled after clashes that led to Hamas taking control of Gaza in June last year.

"It looks like what happened wasn't so much a coup by Hamas but an attempted coup by Fatah that was pre-empted by Hamas before it could happen," said David Wurmser, a former adviser to US vice-president Dick Cheney.

"Israel uses the excuse of Palestinian rocket attacks," said Mona. "But it is trying to hide the fact that the occupation is continuing. Israel stopped directly occupying Gaza in 2004, but it is still controlling our lives by

remote control.

"This is a disproportionate war between an army and a people's resistance. It is the Palestinian people's right to resist occupation."

Amjad said, "Israel killed children in its attack. Were they firing rockets from Gaza? No - they were killed because they were Palestinian, because of their identity and nationality."

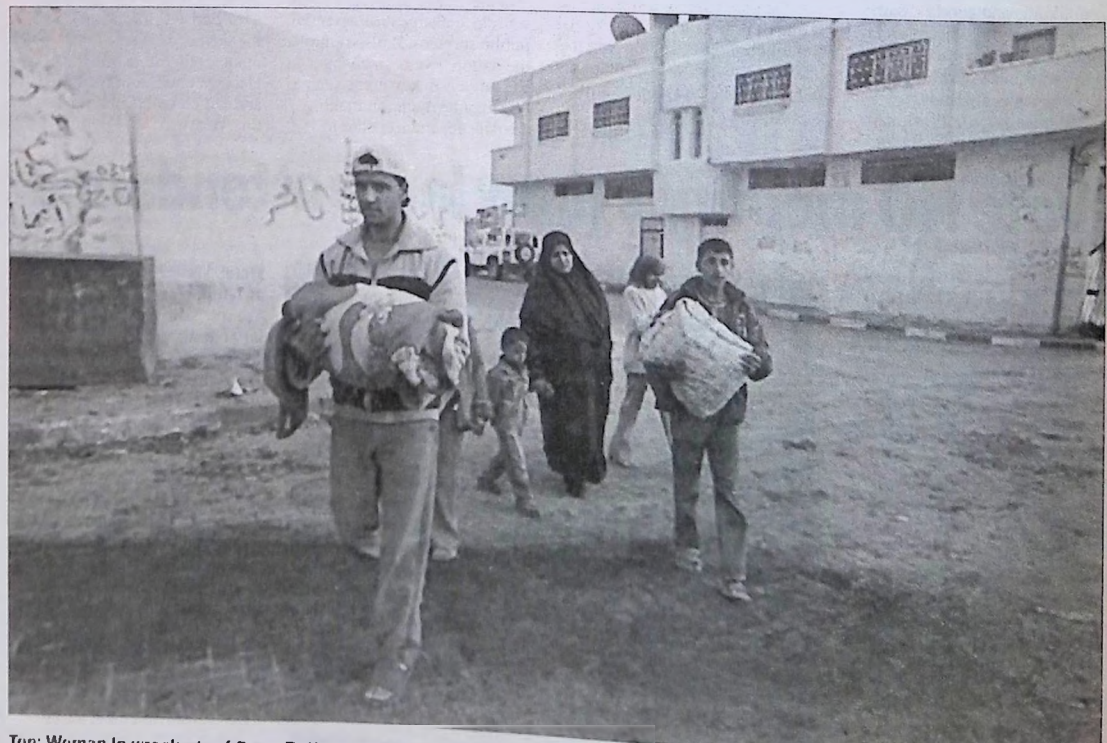
Protests

Amjad and Mona are both calling for people in Britain and other countries to show solidarity with the people of Gaza by joining protests, such as the 15 March World Against War demonstrations.

Amjad said, "We are hoping that the people who value justice will act to help us. We need help to get hope for those who are losing some of it every day. People in the prison of Gaza feel alone. And we need to feel that people in Britain are with us.

"Please show your solidarity with the people in Palestine by joining protests in your country. Show Israel that the Palestinians are not alone and that you are against its crimes. Protest for our children and infants."

Mona said, "Protests against Israel's attacks are important. They make us feel that we are not alone."



Top: Woman in wreckage of Gaza; Bottom: Palestinian families are forced to flee constant Israeli air strikes just outside the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, 1 March 2008. (Wissam Nassar/MaanImages)

Just about everything the millions of anti-war marchers around the globe predicted five years ago on 15 February 2003 has come true.

Iraq has been turned into a sectarian prison. In Baghdad alone 100,000 sections of concrete wall impose sectarian division. The bare figures of a million dead and four million displaced only suggest the agony of a country torn apart by foreign rule.

Afghanistan is a hidden catastrophe. The 2001 invasion was sold to us as humanitarian intervention. Now Oxfam and the Red Cross report that the occupation is itself causing a humanitarian crisis.

The warmongers used to talk of liberating women – now Afghanistan has the second highest rate of maternal death in childbirth in the world. Life expectancy is down to 44, and health provision is virtually non-existent. Not surprisingly, the occupiers are bogged down in heavy fighting.

Even the most delusional of the war's few supporters don't dare claim the world has become safer.

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

"IT IS politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows – the Iraq war is largely about oil," Alan Greenspan, the arch-Republican ex-chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board, admitted in his memoirs last year.

The mainstream media dismissed this argument in the run up to war in Iraq. They instead repeated the lies about weapons of mass destruction. However oil and the control of the world's oil resources go to the heart of the US ruling class's strategy to dominate the 21st century.

If the US controls the major sources of oil, in the Middle East and Africa, they have a heavier leverage to demand the EU, Russia and China accept their dominant global position. The Democrats as well as the Republicans accept the logic of a 'global permanent war' to maintain US hegemony.

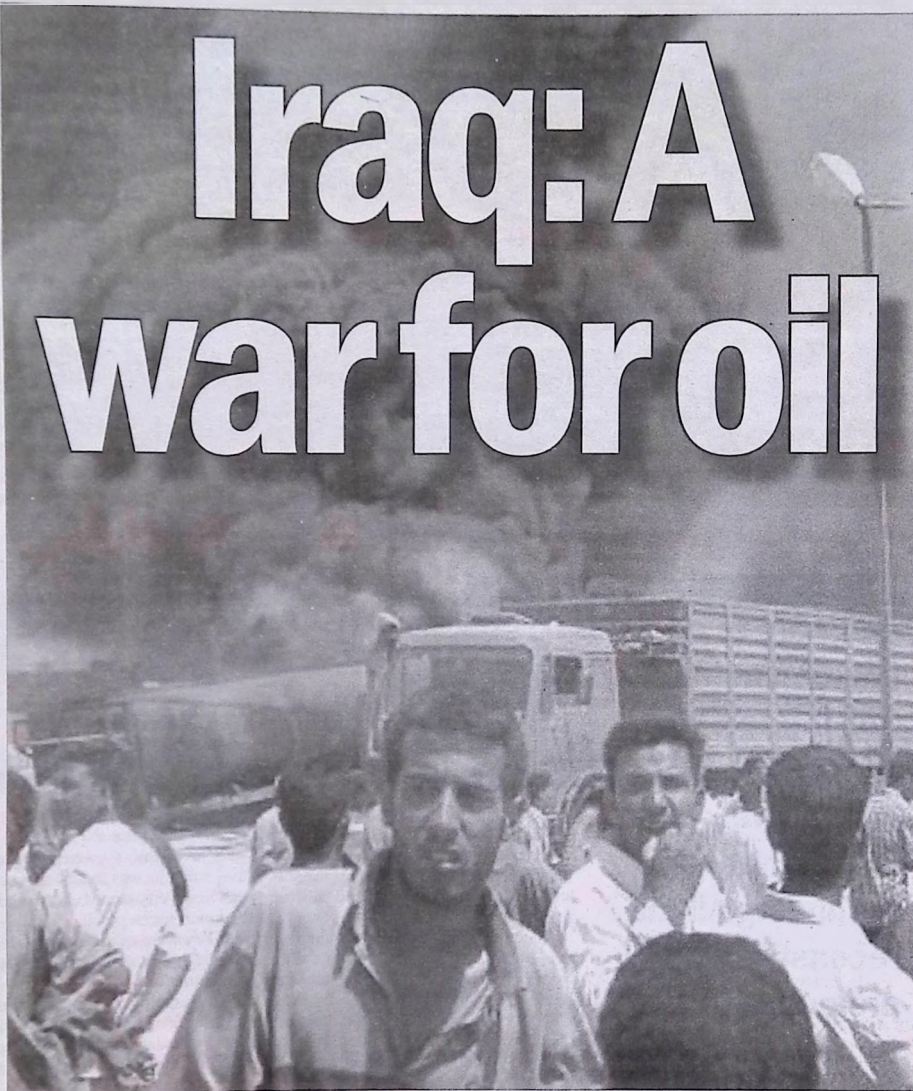
The US has made passing an 'oil law' one of its "benchmarks" to judge the success of its "surge" strategy to regain control of Iraq. The proposed new law will hand over the oil industry to multinational companies and drain Iraq of its wealth.

Hassan Jumaa, the leader of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions which represents 26,000 oil workers in southern Iraq, said, "Iraq produces up to 2,100,000 barrels of oil a day. The revenue from that is \$43 billion. Iraq potentially has a huge amount of revenue".

The Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions has been organizing for the past five years to defend oil workers rights and to keep the oil wealth of Iraq for the people of Iraq. The union staged a two day strike last May demanding revisions to the law and improvements in wages and conditions. The government issued arrest warrants against the union leaders.

"There is agreement among all sections of the US, including among the

Iraq: A war for oil



military and those in the US Congress who want to withdraw from Iraq, that they should have control over our oil".

"George Bush failed in the military aspect of the occupation, but if he can force this law through then he could claim some kind of victory.

"When the US ends its military occupation over our country its economic occupation will continue for many years to come."

According to Hassan Jumaa, the oil law was drafted in secret under US pressure and this "contravened the articles of the new Iraqi constitution that states that Iraqi oil and gas wealth is the property of the Iraqi people.

Oil runs through the history of US capitalism and its efforts to dominate the world. It's where its greatest business dynasty, the Rockefellers, made their money.

Today the Western oil super-majors and their local rivals still ride high at the top of the global corporate hierarchy.

The transformation of the Bush family from East Coast bankers into Texan oilmen – symbolized by George Bush, a Yale frat boy masquerading as a cowboy – demonstrates the attraction of Big Oil.

The Bushes jumped onto the bandwagon after the Second World War. But the dark roots of the US oil industry lie much earlier, in the last decades of the 19th century and the first of the 20th.

There Will Be Blood, Paul Thomas Anderson's new film, probes these roots. The spilling of much blood for Iraq's oil must have been in the background when he wrote and directed There Will Be Blood.

The film is inspired by Upton Sinclair's novel Oil (1927). Sinclair's book was part of a much larger political assault on Big Oil in the early decades of the 20th century. After the Iraq catastrophe, the time is surely ripe for another assault.

How NATO has been defeated in Afghanistan

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

THE ORIGINAL aims of the US-led invasion were the capture of Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, and Osama bin Laden, along with the destruction of Al-Qaeda. None of those aims has been achieved. Instead, the two leaders remain free, while Al-Qaeda has spread from its Afghan base into Pakistan, Iraq and elsewhere, and Afghanistan has become the heroin capital of the world. The Taliban actually wiped out all drug production in 2000.

According to Gideon Polya, based on UNHCR data, the US invasion of Afghanistan has led to as many as 6.6 million unnecessary deaths.

Resistance attacks in Afghanistan are up sharply, and workers are leaving and more and more of the country is labelled extremely dangerous by the United Nations. NATO figures show that attacks on Western and Afghan troops were up by

almost a third last year, to more than 9,000 "significant actions", the highest level since the invasion. The UN estimates the Taliban have just 3,000 active fighters and about 7,000 part-timers, in contrast with more than 50,000 US and NATO troops.

The toughest parts of the south, such as Kandahar, were considered lawless but not extremely dangerous after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Foreign aid workers drove in unarmoured vehicles along the dirt roads of every district in the province, often with no armed guards. No districts of the province – in fact, no districts in the country – were labelled "extreme risk" on the UN's threat assessment maps in May of 2005. The latest map, updated in December, shows 14 of 17 districts in Kandahar are entirely designated as extreme risk.

Most aid organizations have quietly withdrawn their international staff from Kandahar in recent

weeks. For many ordinary people the ramshackle city now feels like a prison, corrupt police prowl the intersections, enforcing a curfew for anybody without that night's password, or bribe money.

Kabul now sees regular rocket attacks, shootings, kidnappings, explosions and suicide bombings. On 15 January rebels attacked Kabul's swish five-star Serena Hotel, targeting the ex-pat elite in the most fortified site in the capital, killing seven guests and staff. This was no straightforward suicide bombing, but a well planned armed attack.

The UN's count of security incidents in Afghanistan last year climbed to 13 times the number recorded in 2003, and the UN forecasts even worse this year. In addition to the 3,572 bombing raids in 2007, suicide bombings climbed to a record 140, compared to five between 2001 and 2005.

The North Atlantic Treaty



Canadian troops in Afghanistan

Organization says rebel attacks increased 64 per cent from 2006 to 2007. In the first two months of this year, some analysts have noticed a 15- to 20-per-cent rise in insurgent activity compared with the same period last year, raising alarm about whether the traditional spring

fighting season has started early.

"Make no mistake, NATO is not winning in Afghanistan," concluded the Atlantic Council of the United States, a prestigious American think tank that deals with international affairs.

In a blunt assessment at the start of March, Vice-Admiral Michael McConnell, the U.S. intelligence czar, admitted that the Karzai government controls less than one-third of the country, an optimistic assessment – many refer to Karzai disparagingly as the 'mayor of Kabul'. As the above reports show, he may no longer even have that title. The resistance can operate openly in most of the country and even have permanent bases in 54 per cent of Afghanistan. McConnell said, "the situation as deteriorating" even though U.S. and allied forces have been roughly doubled since 2004, from about 26,000 to nearly 50,000 today.

'It's a ticking time bomb'



*Dahr Jamail has spent more time reporting from Iraq than any other US journalist. His book, **Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq**, is a chronicle of his experiences there. Here he talks about the supposed "success" of Bush's troop surge, what would happen if Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton wins the White House and why he believes an immediate withdrawal from Iraq is the only way to peace.*

BOTH OBAMA and Clinton have said they won't withdraw the troops. What do you think would happen if the US did withdraw immediately from Iraq?

We have a specific example of what would likely happen throughout Iraq if the US were to withdraw completely.

When the Brits recently pulled out of their last base in Basra City in 2006. The British *Independent* reported that according to the British military, violent attacks dropped 90 percent. I think that goes to show that the occupying armies have been the primary cause of the violence and the instability.

When the US does pull out it would be the first logical step for Iraqis to form their own government. Less than 1 percent of Iraqis polled support the current government or even find it legitimate at all.

The US appointed Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki. We have to remember that he was in no way, shape or form democratically elected. After the January 30, 2005 elections, one of the first tasks of the government was to choose its own prime minister.

It chose Ibrahim Al-Jaafari. And then when he wasn't toeing the US-UK line enough, Condoleezza Rice and her UK counterpart, Jack Straw, flew to Baghdad. And right before they left from their trip, Jaafari was out. Maliki was in.

A recent poll found that a majority of Americans believed that fewer than 10,000 Iraqis had died since the start of the invasion. You've spent about eight months in Iraq unembedded. Tell us about the reality of life in Iraq.

This is a good example of why the media coverage is still so horribly skewed. Even though a lot of people tend to think, "Well, the media is covering around a little bit, that it is showing that the occupation is not going well, and that there's suffering."

But really, contrast what you may see in some of the larger media outlets with some of these figures from the ground in Iraq.

A report produced by *The Lancet* report in October '06 showed 655,000 Iraqis had been killed, or 2.5 percent of the total population of the country.

Another group, called Just Foreign

'The only real first step to a solution in Iraq is full, immediate, unconditional withdrawal, while simultaneously re-funding all the reconstruction projects and turning them over to Iraqi concerns instead of US companies.'



Dahr Jamail

Policy, has taken those 2005 figures and extrapolated from them based on more recent media reports.

It's now estimated that over 1,100,000 Iraqis have been killed. In addition to that, we can estimate that, very conservatively, another 3 million are wounded.

I've been told by a UN spokesperson myself when I was in Syria last summer that this is a severe under-estimation.

Current figures: 2.5 million internally displaced Iraqis in their own country, another 2.5 million refugees outside of the country.

In addition to that, another 4 million Iraqis are in dire need of emergency assistance, according to an Oxfam International report released last July.

When we take into account the fact that Iraq's total population has fallen from 27 million, when the invasion was launched, to now roughly 23 million, when we add all those figures up, that means over half the total population of the entire country are either refugees--in or out of their country--wounded, in dire need of emergency aid, or dead.

In addition to that, we have the infrastructure, where on every measurable level, it's worse now than it was after nearly thirty years of Saddam Hussein's reign, and twelve years of genocidal sanctions.

Even oil exports have not for one day been at or above pre-war levels--and this is where Iraq gets 90 percent of its income. Electricity: the average home has anywhere from zero hours of electricity per day to maybe six or seven hours on a really good day. Unemployment: It's between 60 or 70 percent, vacillating right now.

During the sanctions, it was roughly 33 percent, which is about what it was here during the Great Depression. So 60 to 70 percent unemployment, on top of that, 70 percent inflation. We have 45 percent of Iraqis living in abject poverty on less than \$1 per day. Seventy percent of Iraqis don't even have access to safe drinking water. So that gives you an idea of the magnitude of how horrific the suffering really has become. According to Refugees International, it's the fastest-growing refugee crisis on the planet.

Bush claims the surge worked and that Al-Anbar and other Sunni areas

have been pacified. What happened? or a Barack Obama presidency?

What's happening in Al-Anbar province today is akin to what the US did in Fallujah, when they were repelled out of the city during the April 04 siege.

They essentially saved face by ceasing patrols and buying off the militants in the city.

They put them on the payroll--mujahedeen basically started donning Iraqi police uniforms and Iraqi civil defense corps uniforms--and took over control of security of the city.

When I interviewed them last May, they said this was the most peace they'd had in the city since before the invasion had ever taken place.

They were quite happy with it, most people in the city were quite happy with that situation.

But essentially, the US plan ended up backfiring. Because they had to go back in the city in November, they didn't want it to remain the only liberated city in the country.

That fighting was far more violent and took so many more deaths, on both sides of the conflict, than even the April siege did.

And so we have now a macro version of that same policy in Al-Anbar, where various tribal sheikhs who are willing to collaborate have stepped up.

They're basically being bought off to not fight against the Americans, while simultaneously the Americans, for the moment in Al-Anbar, are sticking closer to their bases, and relying more on air-power than ground troops if any fighting breaks out.

But it's a ticking time bomb and some of the US's new allies are still lobbying mortars into their bases at night.

We have the US military trying to ID all these people, so that when things become violent again, they'll know who these people are and where to go get them, while simultaneously, these same fighters are, of course, gathering very, very valuable intelligence by being able to work with the Americans and go around with them.

Like all of us, you're following the US presidential campaign. Do you see any marked difference for Iraqis in the event of a Hillary Clinton presidency

I don't.

They've both already officially taken the idea of total unconditional withdrawal of all occupation forces out of Iraq off the table, until after their first term.

So it's off the table already until 2013. In reality, they in no way are reflecting the will of the troops on the ground in Iraq, or the majority of Americans now who are opposed to the occupation.

And certainly not respecting the will of the Iraqi people, where the most conservative polls I've found have shown that 85 percent, at a minimum now, of the total population of Iraq are completely opposed to the occupation and want it to end, right now.

Iraqis are willing to take the risk of what might happen if that much-discussed "power vacuum" is created. And the reality is that the only real first step to a solution in Iraq is full, immediate, unconditional withdrawal, while simultaneously re-funding all the reconstruction projects and turning them over to Iraqi concerns instead of US companies.

No candidate is talking about compensation for the Iraqi people.

So, I don't see any of these mainstream candidates talking about any of these things, which are really essential if we're going to talk about a solution to this catastrophe in Iraq.

Who do you see emerging in a post-occupation Iraq if the US did leave?

It's difficult to say at this point, but there are some political figures who do have popular support.

There's a Shia cleric, Sheikh Jawad al-Khalasi, who has mass popular support and Dr. Wamid Omar Nadhmi, a Sunni. Both renowned for being able to bridge differences between Sunni and Shia.

They have started to form a shadow--I wouldn't say government, but a coalition of many different groups.

There's Shia, Sunni, Kurds, Christians, Turkomen groups represented in this political structure. It's based primarily out of Syria, and sometimes they have meetings in Jordan, but this type of political structure would be able to come in and, I think, begin to fill what vacuum would be created.



Palestinians carry the body of Salsabeel Abu Jalhoumm, a 21-month-old girl who was killed early on Sunday when an Israeli air strike hit near her home in the northern Gaza Strip, 2 March 2008. (Wissam Nassary/ Maanimages)

ISRAEL: GUILTY OF WAR CRIMES

By GORETTI HORGAN

SEVEN MEMBERS of the Derry Anti War Coalition attended an International Tribunal of Conscience in Brussels at the end of February. The Tribunal accused Israel of war crimes, during its assault against Lebanon in July and August 2006. The accusations including Israel's breaching of Articles 2 and 4 of the UN Charter which bans war except for defence reasons: genocide crimes against Article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and against Article 4 of the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. An international panel of judges from Colombia, Cuba, France and India presided. There was a stream of witnesses to these war crimes, each with stories that would have drawn tears from a stone. For example Salam Daher, who was a civil defence worker in Southern Lebanon at the time of the war and who many people would recognise from the photos of the 30th July massacre at Qana. Salam told the Tribunal about the difficulties the Civil Defence team he worked with faced. He explained that the level of bombing was so great and ambulances were being attacked - in breach of international law - so they frequently had to wait hours before going to the aid of those who had been bombed. Salam had personally witnessed the impact of what was later confirmed by scientists to be a thermobaric bomb on an apartment block.

He showed photographs of the victims' bodies - not a sight anyone should have to see. Thermobaric bombs are not illegal but should be. However, it is against international law to use these bombs on civilian, as opposed to military targets.

Yet, there is clear evidence of them being used not only in Southern Lebanon but even in built-up areas of Beirut.

An article published in the Marine Corps Gazette in 2000 details the effects of the use of thermobaric, or "fuel-air" weapons, by the Russians in Grozny.

These bombs form a cloud of volatile gases or finely powdered explosives. "This cloud is then ignited and the subsequent fireball sears the surrounding area while consuming the oxygen in this area.

"The lack of oxygen creates an enormous overpressure. ... Personnel under the cloud are literally crushed to death.

"Outside the cloud area, the blast wave travels at some 3,000 meters per second. ...

"As a result, a fuel-air explosive can have the effect of a tactical nuclear weapon without residual radiation. ...

"Those personnel caught directly under the aerosol cloud will die from the flame or overpressure.

"For those on the periphery of the strike, the injuries can be severe. Burns, broken bones, contusions from flying debris and blindness may result.

"Further, the crushing injuries from the overpressure can create

air embolism within blood vessels, concussions, multiple internal hemorrhages in the liver and spleen, collapsed lungs, rupture of the eardrums and displacement of the eyes from their sockets."

The Tribunal also heard from two doctors of very clear war crimes in relation to the bombing of ambulances and of hospitals.

Dr. Mustafa Badar is a GP and Mayor of the town of Nabatyeh in Southern Lebanon, about 20 kms from the border with Israel.

More than 250 civilians were killed in his town alone.

He personally witnessed the bombing of ambulances that were clearly marked with red crosses. He also spoke about the ongoing deaths in the South from the millions of cluster bombs which were dropped by Israel in the hours before the ceasefire that ended the war came into effect.

Dr. Hadar Degmak was based in a hospital in South Beirut during the war. He told the Tribunal about the bombing of South Beirut, an area which is highly populated, much of which was destroyed entirely.

Two hospitals in the area were bombed, one of which was clearly marked as a hospital and could not have been mistaken for a residential building or office block. He and other doctors moved to a hospital near Beirut airport but even this suffered some bombing.

Perhaps the most shocking evidence brought before the Tribunal came from a number of scientists who showed that Israel had used missiles with warheads that contained enriched uranium. This was a surprise to many since the United Nations and others

had said there was no evidence of the use of depleted uranium in the weapons used in the war. It turns out that this was true: depleted uranium *wasn't* used. However, Dr. Mohammed Ali Kobeissy, a nuclear physicist at the American University of Beirut, Dr. Paola Manduca, Professor of Genetics at Genoa University, Italy and Dai Williams, an English weapons expert, all produced scientific evidence to prove the use of enriched uranium in at least some of the bombs dropped in the course of the war.

A number of human rights' lawyers summarised some of the ways in which Israel is guilty of war crimes: first, the assault on Lebanon was not a war of defence. The capture of two Israeli soldiers on the border was not an assault on the sovereignty of Israel and, in any case, Hezbollah offered to swap those soldiers for prisoners in Israeli hands.

Inflammatory statements by leading Israeli politicians, such as saying that any village from which a rocket is fired will be destroyed or the statement of the IDF chief of staff that Israel aimed to put Lebanon back 20 years, are clear indications of Israel's policy of collective punishment. These statements, it was argued, indicate a will to commit acts of genocide.

Despite being asked on several occasions and in many ways to send a lawyer to the Tribunal to defend itself, Israel was unrepresented at the Tribunal. Unsurprisingly, given the amount of evidence against it, Israel was found guilty of a series of war crimes by the panel of International judges.

UPDATE ON RAYTHEON NINE CASE

THE MEDIA gag on reporting of the Raytheon 9 trial has been lifted. This followed an application for judicial review of the gag by Shane O'Curry, a member of the Foyle Ethical Investment Campaign.

Lawyers had told the Raytheon 9 and the Derry Anti War Coalition that there was no point in anyone in anyway involved in the non-violent direct action against Raytheon on August 9th 2006 seeking a review of the gag. Happily, Shane had been in Rosport on the day of the occupation. So he was able to go to the High Court and seek to have the gagging order lifted.

However, before the judicial review could be heard, the Lord Chief Justice intervened and told legal representatives Barbara Muldoon and Ronan Laverty that there would be no need for them to make their arguments as the gag was about to be lifted. It seems that, when it came to having to defend the gag, the Courts realised that it was indefensible.

So, it is now perfectly legal for Socialist Worker to report what it reported illegally some weeks ago: the trial of the Raytheon 9 has been moved to Belfast where it is to start on May 19th.

"THE ARAB people now consider Hezbollah to be heroes because they are confronting the enemy [Israel] and protecting their land... Even if Hezbollah were destroyed, another Hezbollah would emerge within a year or two somewhere else - maybe in Jordan, in Syria, in Egypt or in Iraq."

Perhaps when he spoke these words King Abdullah of Jordan was thinking of his father's comments when, in 1968, 200 Palestinian fedayeen (fighters) fought the Israeli army at the Jordanian town of Karameh: "We are all fedayeen now."

Back then, the fact that Palestinians had taken up arms to fight for their own liberation electrified the Arab world. It stood in contrast to the rout of the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian armies by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War.

Yet four decades later, Israel still occupies Palestine and US clients are in power in from Egypt to Saudi Arabia.

For all its heroism, the struggle of the Palestinian nationalist movement also shows the limits of national liberation. In 1968 Yasser Arafat led the fedayeen at Karameh. In 1993, his Fatah movement accepted a peace deal which left most of Palestine under Israeli occupation.

In 2006, tired of compromises and corruption, Palestinian voters kicked Fatah out of office in favour of the Islamist group Hamas.

The Egyptian revolution followed a similar pattern. A rebellion in 1952 ended the era of direct imperialist control by Britain. But following the catastrophic defeat of nationalist leader Gamal Abdul Nasser in the 1967 war, Egypt's rulers scurried to embrace neo-liberalism, allied themselves with the US and made peace with Israel.

Alone, Egypt was no military match for an Israeli regime armed and financed by the US. Alone, Egypt's experiment in state-run "socialism" could not survive the pressures of a global economy.

Common interests

Nasser, of course, would have agreed. He dreamed of breaking down borders drawn by chance and colonial whim, uniting Arabs in a new regional superstate, based on a common language, cultural affinity and a shared history of struggle against imperialism.

Today, many Islamist activists argue for an anti-imperialist movement uniting Muslims across the globe - crossing national borders, and transcending divisions of race and language.

These projects assume Arabs or Muslims share a common interest in fighting imperialism. But in reality Arab and Muslim societies are divided by class, and this basic fact shapes the lives of ordinary people across the Middle East.

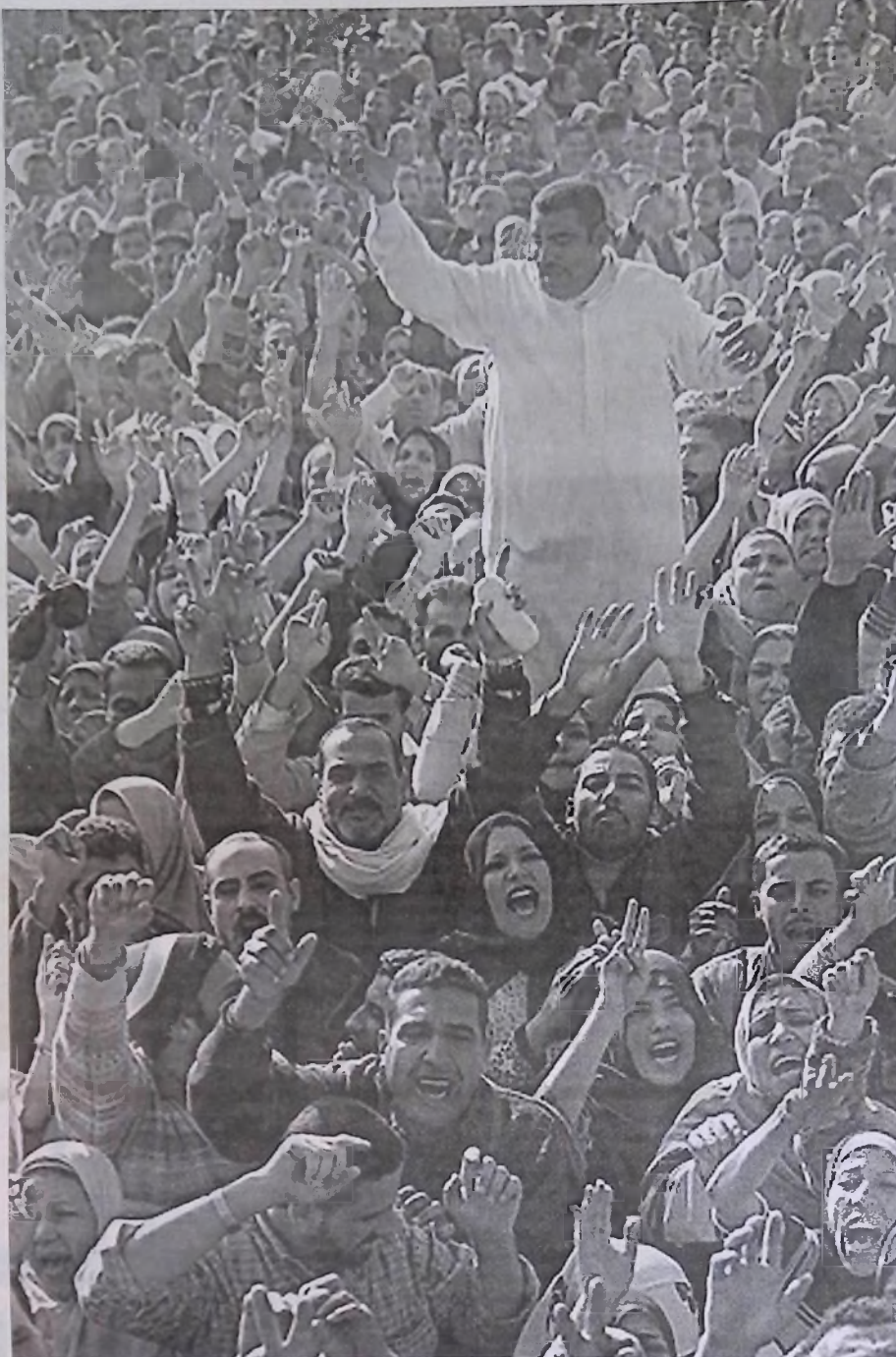
Three decades of neo-liberalism have created societies more polarised than ever between rich and poor. The interests of capitalists and the state are enmeshed. Financial "reform" means cheap loans for big business, privatisation hands state resources to companies owned by the children of government ministers, while development projects siphon money to corporate shareholders.

The Egyptian ruling class may be a junior partner in global capitalism, but it has no stake in the demise of the current economic system.

Hezbollah's conception of the struggle between oppressors and oppressed, of a dividing line within every society, makes more sense in our globalised world than the idea of a united Arab nation confronting an external aggressor. Yet even this conception has its problems.

Siding with the oppressed is vital, but only recognising their oppression ignores the unique power that ordinary people have to transform society. The mass of people have the power to create a different world, not because they are downtrodden but because they are workers.

It is workers who keep the oil flowing through the pipelines of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, workers who take ships



Workers take to streets in Egypt

Is an Arab revolution on the agenda?

Anne Ashford gives a historical perspective on the possibility of radical change across the Middle East

along the Suez Canal, workers who bake bread, drive trains, serve fries at McDonald's and sweep the floors of tourists' hotel rooms.

This labour supports the economy of every Middle Eastern state, and therefore the stability of every Middle Eastern government.

The working class is the only force in society that can escape the limits

of national liberation, because it also challenges the rule of imperialism's internal allies - the powerful local elites in countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In many countries the working class - those dependent on waged employment - are a minority in societies composed mainly of peasants, small traders and other groups.

It was Leon Trotsky who, in his analysis of the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions, showed how organised workers in modern industry could become the core of a wider revolutionary movement.

Their concentration in key economic sectors and large workplaces could compensate for their small number, and allow them to lead other oppressed

groups in revolutionary struggle. Trotsky argued that no other class could achieve this. The Russian middle class was too weak and cowardly, and the peasantry was too divided to play such a role.

The same points apply to Egypt today. The ruling class has no interest in confronting imperialism. Sections of the middle class might wish for greater democratic freedom and less US domination of the region, but they lack the collective economic power of organised workers.

Just as in Russia, it will fall to workers to win national liberation in the Middle East. Imagine if general strikes stopped Saudi oil flowing to the West, brought Cairo and Baghdad to a standstill and halted US warships on the Suez Canal. And why stop there?

Under workers' control, the resources of the Middle East could be channelled into healthcare and education, instead of weapons systems, international debt repayments and the luxury lifestyles of the elite.

When workers lead struggles for democracy or against imperialism, those struggles raise the possibility of socialist revolution.

Trotsky how the potential existed for "the democratic revolution to grow over immediately into the socialist". And such revolutions can spread across borders. Trotsky dubbed this process "permanent revolution".

This is not a pipe dream. There are countless examples showing the power of workers in the Middle East.

In 1979, it was a strike by oil workers, together with a rebellion in the armed forces, which overthrew the Shah of Iran. His dictatorship was described by Washington as the "second pillar" of their domination of the region, Israel being the first.

In 1991, Egypt signed a structural adjustment programme drawn up by the International Monetary Fund which among other things abolished subsidies on basic food items. Riots forced the government to bring back the bread subsidy.

The democracy movement in Egypt, known as Kifaya ("enough"), recently called on Egyptian oil workers to stop supplying Israel with the energy it needs to wage war on Lebanon.

A new left

Across the Arab world a new left is beginning to emerge. Inevitably it has been forced to address issues raised by the failure of the Arab nationalist revolutions of the 1950s and of Arafat's Fatah movement.

Translating the potential for working class power into reality means bridging the gap between the small forces of organised revolutionaries and the millions of people radicalised by political and economic crisis.

This is a question socialists in the Middle East have grappled with since the 1940s. Tragically, they did not always find the right answer. Sometimes the left stood aloof from the struggle for national liberation because it was not under their control. More commonly, they substituted other social forces for the leadership of the working class.

Communists in Egypt dissolved themselves into Nasser's state-run party, arguing that independent working class organisation was an obstacle to national unity. They saw the state under nationalist leadership as the main vehicle in the fight against imperialism.

In reality the opposite is true. Only an international movement, linking together workers across the Arab world and beyond, has the strength to defeat imperialism.

Today imperialist war in the Middle East has the potential to bring all classes outside the narrow ruling elite into conflict with the current political system. This creates the possibility of a broad unity of forces ranged against imperialism and its local allies.

But unless the working class, organised independently, wins leadership of this broader movement, the rebellions will follow the same path to defeat as those in the 1950s and 1960s.

China cracks down ahead of Olympics

By NORA BOYLE

THIS AUGUST the might of the newest power will be on display, a vision of the future founded on human suffering and gross inequality.

However it is proving difficult for the CCP to present a peaceful image while keeping a lid on political unrest. One of the worst divides of rich and poor in the world is making the ordinary people of China cry dissent. The support of international pressure with grassroots protests can help to save people from oppression in China. The Olympics historically can provide an opportunity to make a political point. In 1968 two American sprinters gave the Black Panther salute on the podium. So this August freedom for falun gong prisoners, compensation and re-housing for evictees, closure of black jails, the freedom of the people to assembly and freedom from all human rights abuse should become part of the global media spotlight on Beijing.

Before the launch of its Olympic bid in 2001 (the same year China joined the WTO) China voluntarily signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which states "Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice." Liu Jingmin vice-president of the Olympic Games bid committee promised in April 2001, "By allowing Beijing to host the games you will help the development of human rights". Liu Qi the President of Beijing's Olympics Organising Committee again promised in September 2006 "China will live up to its words and will turn its words into deeds."

Unfortunately the reality is not so rosy. It is estimated that by August 2008 one and half million Chinese people will have been unlawfully forced from their homes to make way for new developments. The Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions estimate 15,000 people a month are evicted in Beijing.



Bird's Nest Olympic stadium which opens in March and is built on site of evictions

The illusion is to be cast that Beijing is modern, open and harmonious city, an ideal place for investment. President Liu claims that in preparing for the event, 'people's living conditions have been upgraded and their living environment has improved remarkably'.

Meanwhile residents have their sewage pipes sabotaged in order to drive them out. New luxury apartments and offices can command huge prices in the market friendly metropolis. The Beijing elite super-rich children of 'communist' officials called 'princlings' amass vast sums through property development.

Demolition victims are living in slums in tents following forced evictions. All they are asking is for enough compensation to buy a new home. Repression is so severe that even residents funerals are broken up to prevent civil discord.

According to International Human Rights Organisations human rights violations are increasing in the countdown to the Olympics. Farmers protesting against land seizures by signing a petition "We want human rights not the Olympics" have faced suppression and arrest.

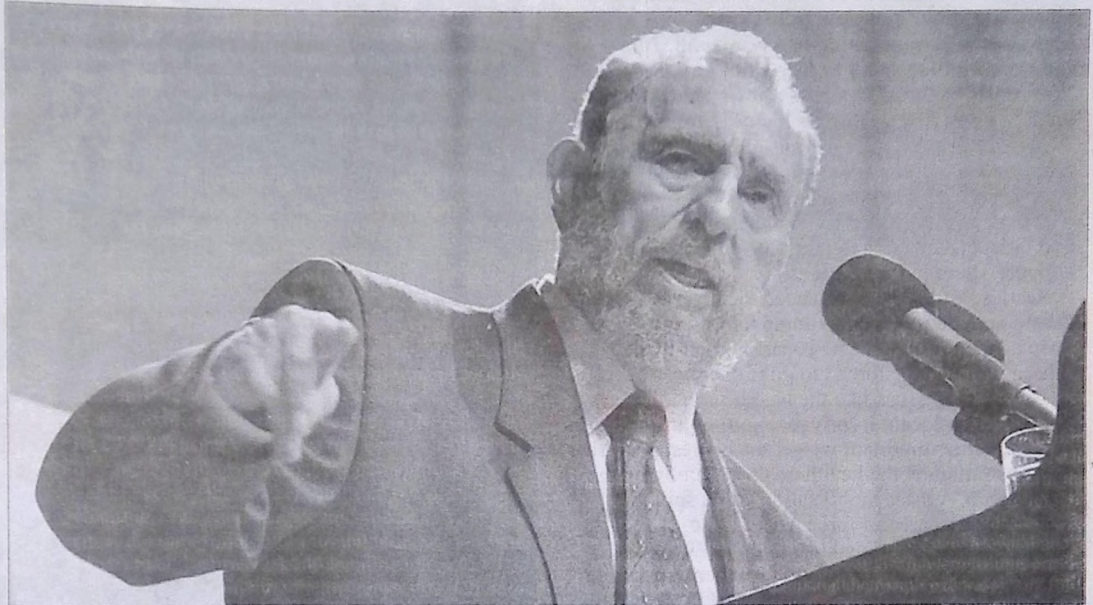
State security convictions have increased 20% between 2006 and 2007. Dissenters are increasingly being charged with 'inciting subversion against state power'. The Chinese government has adopted the use of a "hard-strike" anti-crime campaign to evict the homeless, sex workers and undocumented rural migrant workers from Beijing.

Much of the worst human rights violations take place in the occupied territories of Tibet and East Turkestan. It is estimated that 100,000s of innocent falun gong prisoners have been executed in the past 8 years. In 36 known centres around China, prisoners eyes, livers and hearts are extracted while they're alive and sold for huge profits.

The webcam testimony of Hu Jia calling for 2008 to be 'the year of human rights in China' resulted in his detention in December and formal arrest on January 30. As the main source of information regarding the imprisonment of human rights campaigners his right to lawyers has been denied due to revealing "state secrets". His wife Zeng Jinyan and daughter have been confined to house arrest with internet and telephone lines cut as the state forces repression on prisoners families in order to prevent them seeking justice.

A translator for Channel 4 was held for 16 hours and subjected to taunts of 'traitor' by police for helping to expose Beijing's 'black jails'. In 'black Jails' 20-30 people are held to a room. Many of the prisoners are made up of evictees who complain. Even old people and the handicapped get beaten by goons in black jumpsuits.

Cuba after Fidel Castro



By MIKE GONZALEZ

IT IS a very long time since Cuba appeared on the front pages of the world's press – probably not since the Missile Crisis of 1962.

But recent weeks have produced acres of newsprint speculating about the impact of Fidel Castro's resignation. After 49 years in power he is one of the world's longest serving political leaders.

It is right to regard the survival of the Cuban Revolution as an achievement. Almost from the first moment, the United States did everything in its power to destroy it. It cut sugar imports, sent mercenaries, started an economic blockade. And it was always looking for bizarre ways to kill Castro.

But Cuba survived – by entering a relationship with the Soviet Union which was almost as dependent and unequal as the previous link to the U.S. When the relationship ended in 1986, the effect on Cuba was dramatic. The 'Special Period in time of peace' was a time of austerity and hardship.

Cuba survived this too. But there was a price to pay – economically and politically. Cubans are rightly proud of their excellent health and education systems. But the wider reality is that 49 years after the revolution the life of many Cubans is precarious and

hard.

If survival in itself is an achievement, in the face of relentless US hostility, there is another side to the long presidency of Fidel. What kind of society is Cuba? Socialism is more than simply the centralization of control of the economy, which happened in Cuba within a year of the revolution. It is also a political process that puts the working class at the centre of power, developing an advanced form of democracy in which, increasingly, power is transferred to the base of society. Not only that – it is also a system in which it is the interests of that majority that shape and determine economic and social decisions.

In Cuba, Fidel Castro has held power simultaneously in govern-

ment, the Communist Party and the army. He may or may not be popular – but he has never been elected to his post, nor has it been possible for any other political forces to develop within the revolution that might challenge the course of the revolution from within.

The last Congress of the communist party was ten years ago. The decision of who should take over is made within the ruling group and announced to a waiting population.

Looking at Cuba now, it seems to have emerged from the crisis of the early nineties. Economic growth is remarkable at just under 10% a year – achieved largely through the spectacular growth of tourism and the ris-

ing world price of Cuban nickel. Venezuelan oil has also made a major contribution. But it is only a small section of Cuban society that gets to enjoy the fruits of the new prosperity, and buy the expensive cars that circulate around Havana's streets. They are the people with access to dollars – they work in the tourist industry, run private restaurants or bed and breakfasts, or are among the carefully selected people who can travel abroad. They are the new managers of the Cuban economy. And while they and Raúl himself, are clearly committed to increasing trade with the West and particularly with China, there is no sign at all that the lives of the majority of Cubans will change nor that modernization or development in the economy will go hand in hand with political change.

After forty years of siege Cubans are not taken in by the American dream. As a leader of one of the Miami Cuban groups that favour dialogue said recently 'You don't take lessons in democracy from the man who is bombing Iraq!'

But as they see around them growing income differences and the corruption that always goes with shortages, the question is not how to make an economic model work, but how to rebuild a socialism that is democratic and open, and whose leaders are not self-appointed for life.



Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev

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The Left's chance to get Ahern and FF

Bertie Ahern has been exposed as being as corrupt as Chairlle Haughey. The revelations in recent weeks about secret bank accounts where 'personal political donations' were hidden has exposed him as a liar to all. This money was then used to buy a house for his then partner Celia Ahern. It shows that Ahern was as good at grafting as his old mentor.

The extreme lengths Ahern is going to in the courts to try to close the tribunal down shows how serious these revelations are.

It is an absolute disgrace that the Green Party and independents like Finian McGrath continue to support Ahern in government.

Sections of FF have distanced themselves from Ahern and are prepared to dump him. But this will only happen if they see he is past his sell-by date. Ahern will only be forced to go if the government is defeated on issues like the health service cut-backs and co-location (privatization) of hospitals. It is therefore important we get the biggest possible demonstration on the health crisis in Dublin on the 29th March. A mass mobilisation could split the government apart and force Ahern to go.

Sections of the ruling class and the EU elite are now worried that Ahern could lose them the Lisbon Treaty.

They fear the referendum could become a referendum on the government and on him personally. This is exactly what the left must do, turn the Lisbon vote into a vote of no-confidence in the government and a vote of anger over the economy and the health crisis.

No to a pay freeze

Construction bosses are calling for a pay freeze because of the economic downturn. They claim it's the only way they can continue to build 'affordable' homes.

But construction bosses are sitting on 220,000 empty houses and apartments while tens of thousands of people are on a waiting list for a home. Instead of workers taking a pay cut, the developers should be forced to cut their profits by reducing house prices.

The bosses want workers to pay for the hard times through pay-cuts. They want to attack workers rights by using recruitment agencies.

They want to divide workers by trying to force recent immigrants to Ireland to accept lower wages.

It is great to see the unions respond to this by starting a campaign to defend agency workers.

The unions are demanding these workers get the same employment rights as in other EU countries. The Irish government is one of the 3 EU governments resisting the extension of employment rights to agency workers.

How can union leaders any longer claim that employers or this government are our partners?

The unions need to take on the government and take the campaign to the streets and to the picket line if necessary.

Outrage over Gaza

On Friday, 29 February 2008, Israel's deputy defense minister Matan Vilnai threatened Palestinians in Gaza with a "holocaust".

For an Israeli leader who is Jewish, in particular, to threaten anyone with holocaust is a sad irony of history. In the 48 hours that followed that statement over 100 Palestinian civilians were killed in the Gaza strip.

The Irish government and the rest of the EU simply watched and said nothing.

Instead of isolating Israel by cutting of diplomatic and economic ties, European governments treat Israel with reverence, celebrating its so-called 60th anniversary, a gruesome event of ethnic cleansing and colonial ruin itself, showering it with economic, political and scientific support.

The burning injustice of the occupations of Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan need to be harnessed to help bring the global anti-war movement back onto the streets to force our government to withdraw from the 'coalition of terror'.

The obsession with beauty



By SANA FAROOQ KHAN

COSMETIC SURGERY has become one of the most popular trends around the world.

Whether you are reading a magazine, watching the news, or a TV program, you are likely to see or hear something about cosmetic surgery.

Shows such as "Extreme Makeover", MTV's "I Want a Famous Face", and Fox's show "The Swan" cosmetic surgery has become a normal part of our lives. With programs like these contributing to the overwhelming popularity of cosmetic surgery, the number of people having these surgeries has greatly increased.

Millions of people undergo risky surgery every year simply to improve or enhance a feature of their body. While the results may seem foolproof and glamorous, it is actually a very risky procedure.

Older societies in human history like the ancient Greeks thought of objects or nature as being inherently beautiful: beauty is inside the object; "The beauty within an object is its pure and ideal beauty". Today beauty no longer resides inside. The road to becoming beautiful is a long, hard and most impor-

tantly a thin road.

In earlier societies fuller figured women were the ideal pictures of beauty. Now you have to be a twig to be considered beautiful. Society is to blame for this. Society keeps on pushing the emphasis on being beautiful. Through magazines, ads to lose weight, hundreds of diets to help in the fight against fat.

Wherever you go you cannot escape this crazy obsession with being thin and beautiful. When driving, giant billboards are a constant reminder of what's beautiful and what's not. It's a sick obsession that has gone too far. It's taken way to seriously, even to the point of death.

Adolescence is the most vul-

nerable point in anyone's life. Being a teenager is not easy and there are many daily pressures. These societal pressures can cause eating disorders in teenagers as a result of insecurity and depression about body image and being constantly reminded of a pecking order based on beauty.

Teens need to be able to express all types of emotions. They should be encouraged to do their best, but they should not be expected to be perfect. They need to be encouraged to be themselves and to be proud of who they are.

Men want to become the big muscled type that is shown in every commercial. While women want to the skinny model look. But the truth of the matter is that a majority of people will never be what an ideal image of beauty is.

The most well known eating disorders are: Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa and mostly affect women and girls. People with these eating disorders often have a psychological profile of low self-esteem and the feeling of helplessness. They tend to blame their problems of their appearances. Of the two Bulimia is more common and is preyed upon and even promoted by the

giant food companies pushing 'low-calorie' or diet foods. People with this disease can appear outwardly cheerful but underneath are hurting and feel inadequate because they think themselves imperfect.

These diseases are more prevalent in developed nations. More and more people are developing eating disorders in developed countries each year.

As well as a physical ideal of beauty women are expected to conform to a psychological ideal as well. Women are not supposed to rebel and are usually described as being 'good'. Such inhibition can lead to being terrified of being ridiculed and feeling humiliated and extremely sensitive to failure and criticism.

Part of this is caused by the pressure to obtain the perfect image. But an ideal image can never be obtained because of the changing views of society.

In today's world beauty is only skin deep and extreme steps are being taken to achieve this. The majority of young teens and children are being taught that beauty is everything. They are developing problems that are harmful and potentially fatal. Something must be done before this obsession goes out of control.



Michael Jackson: Blonic man?



US-EU PLANS for Africa are about increasing its dominance and the grip of Western multinationals, writes Ken Olende, and they will only make the people's suffering worse.

The EU, most notably the French, are working in a close alliance with the US to re-establish the West as the dominant economic and military presence in Africa as opposed to the growing influence of China. French president Nicolas Sarkozy last year made a high profile trip around Africa. France is building a nuclear reactor in Libya and is busily trying to re-establish its imperial position in North Africa.

It is in this light that we should see the recent Irish army mission to Chad. Alongside other high profile interventions such as Sierra Leone, the EU wants to establish that Africa is its 'back-yard' in the same way the US views South America.

Growing imperial ambitions became clearer in February last year when George Bush announced the creation of Africom – a new unified US military command for Africa. Africom became operational in October. It is currently based in Stuttgart, Germany.

Currently the main US base in Africa is in Djibouti, which borders Ethiopia, with some 1,500 personnel. However, the US also has access to air bases and ports across Africa. It has established what it calls "lily pads" in several more – facilities maintained by local troops

AFRICOM & the new scramble for Africa

that can be used to extend the US military's strike range.

Such facilities currently exist in Gabon, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia.

Zambian minister Mike Mulongoti said that inviting Africom in would be "like allowing a giant to settle in your home".

The US justification for establishing the project is spelled out in a report to Congress from this July, in a crucial passage, the report notes, "Africa recently surpassed the Middle East as the US's largest supplier of crude oil, further emphasising the continent's strategic importance."

The report goes on to liken Africom's role to that of Southcom, which was

established in 1983 to cover Central and South America while the US was undermining the left wing Sandinista government in Nicaragua and backing the death squads in El Salvador.

Economic and imperial power are always combined. A 2005 report to the US Congress on progress in the "war on terror" was very concerned about Africa, partly because it wildly overestimated the influence and coherence of Al Qaida as an organisation.

Western military operations go a long way to reinforcing the economic power of institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that police African economies with a heavy stick.

Even the most pro-Western leaders in Africa understand the role of these

institutions in the creation of Africa's debt crisis. The stranglehold of Western banks and multinationals has served to make an already dire economic situation worse for the majority of Africans.

Before his execution by the Nigerian state in 1995, Ken Saro Wiwa was exposing companies like Shell and BP, who were making millions from Nigeria's oil wealth while local people suffered.

Oil is not the only economic reason for the return of US interest in Africa. There is a much more concrete reason for US sabre rattling in Africa than the often elusive presence of Al Qaida.

China is now second only to the US as Africa's largest trading partner. Trade between Africa and China for 2007 was over \$70 billion, up from \$56 billion the previous year, and it is currently

showing no sign of levelling off.

Local sub-imperialisms, such as South Africa and Nigeria, are also trying to assert their own influence – which is the reason why the EU was hostile to an African Union force, as opposed to an EU lead force, going in to police the crisis in Darfur.

The extremely uneven but nevertheless enormous growth of some African economies has had another effect – the creation of vast cities.

It is estimated that in 20 years the Gulf of Guinea, a major oil producing region, will have more cities with a population of over one million than the US. The mass of people in these cities live in extreme poverty and they are hotbeds of resistance.

However the choice is not simply between accepting imperialist military and economic investment from Western powers, or investment from China, which also happens to be doing a roaring trade in arms sales to Africa.

It is also not about relying on a coalition of African nations to act independently of the major players.

Resistance movements in cities across Africa provide a third alternative. Workers and the poor have already stirred in Egypt, Nigeria, Guinea and South Africa.

The movements have yet to reach the levels achieved in Latin America, but the possibility does exist of massive struggles, across several countries, against both neoliberalism and imperialism.

Kosovo is a pawn on the imperial chessboard

by VLADIMIR UNKOVSKI-KORICA, BALKAN Socialist in Belgrade

SOCIALISTS in the Balkans face a difficult period ahead.

The region has long been at the centre of imperial rivalry between the US and European Union (EU) on one side and Russia on the other. Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence marks a new stage in the ratcheting up of tensions.

Following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, the US initiated a strategy to encircle Russia and block its future revival.

Its other aim was to secure oil and natural gas supply routes from central Asia. In order to do this, the US had to show that it alone could restore and guarantee order in the Balkans, where civil war was raging.

The US intervened militarily in

Bosnia in 1995, then bombed Serbia over the Kosovo issue in 1999.

Now it has recognised Kosovo's independence, blatantly disregarding promises made in a United Nations (UN) resolution at the end of the 1999 war.

Lately, however, Russia has been asserting itself in the Balkans, a region where it feels it has reasonable prospects of influence – because of religion and history, but above all because of the resentment US intervention has bred among Serbs.

Russia has been using its considerable energy resources to secure greater influence. It has a deal to build an oil pipeline with Bulgaria and Greece and it has just bought Serbia's state oil industry.

Kosovo's declaration of independence needs to be seen in this context.

It was orchestrated by the US and the leading EU powers – Britain, France and Germany – to counter Russia's moves in the region.

But the declaration was also about shoring up the government in Kosovo itself. In 1999 the US subcontracted the province's government to the UN, whose administration has provoked resentment and discontent among Kosovan Albanians.

After almost nine years of UN rule Kosovo has the lowest income per head in Europe.

Moreover, the US and EU have not given up control in Kosovo – they have merely replaced UN colonial rule with EU colonial rule. Ultimate power will still reside in the EU's International Civilian Representative, which has the authority "to annul decisions or laws adopted by Kosovo authorities and sanction or remove

public officials".

As Gerald Knaus, chairman of the European Stability Initiative, has observed, "Kosovo will not be independent in any sense."

Serbia leans on Russia for diplomatic support to block a UN seat for Kosovo, but also on countries such as Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania.

Its real aim is the Cyprus-style partition of Kosovo, with three Serb majority provinces in the north returning to direct Serbian rule.

US support for Kosovo and Russia's backing for Serbia serve only to entrench Serbs and Albanians in their nationalist positions, as they feel emboldened to seek advantage over one another with backing from the "great powers".

In this context, it is the duty of Serbian socialists to challenge Serb

nationalism and to argue that Serbian workers gain nothing from the state's claim to Kosovo.

This allows us to challenge our own ruling class and that of Russia with clarity, while helping us build bridges with Kosovan Albanians.

But this does not mean we believe that an independent Kosovo, whether real or symbolic, can solve the problem of Serb-Albanian relations.

Attempts to carve out ethnically pure states have led inevitably to war and ethnic cleansing. In a region as diverse as the Balkans there can be no nationalist solutions.

Instead we must build solidarity networks that link grassroots social and anti-imperialist protests across the Balkans to challenge all forms of oppression, and argue for genuine self-determination in a socialist federation of the Balkans.

How empires die

Modern leaders looking for a 'civilised' way to dominate the world refer to the Roman Empire. Historian **Neil Faulkner** explained the brutal reality to Ken Olende

WHAT MOTIVATED you to write your new book *Rome—Empire Of The Eagles* on the history of the Roman Empire?

Most histories, if they aren't broadly uncritical, tend to make excuses for the Roman Empire. They admit that there was a lot of nastiness such as the massacrings of enemies, slavery and gladiators.

But then they point to lots of good things, like towns, roads, central heating, bathhouses and mosaics—as if that cancels the other out.

When we look at a modern society we evaluate it on the basis of what is fundamental to it as a social and political system. People writing about Nazi Germany don't say it was half good—"You got decent motorways as well as death camps."

Rome was an exercise in imperialism—the use of physical force to dominate territory, labour and resources—and that is a bad thing.

And when people today argue that imperialism can be a force for achieving freedom, democracy and progress, they often refer to the Roman Empire to support that idea.

It is important to be able to engage with that argument. Of course capitalist imperialism is profoundly different from imperialism in the ancient world. But the Roman Empire was no different from any other empire in that it was an exercise in carnage and looting to enrich a few.

YOU PRESENT the story of the empire as a logical progression, covering a vast sweep of time from the founding of Rome to the collapse of the Western Empire.

There is a single thread that runs right the way through the history of the empire.

There was a period of about 250 years from the third century BC to the end of the first century BC when expansion was absolutely dynamic.

In that period Rome went from being the dominant state in central Italy to becoming the greatest empire in the world at the time, dominating the whole of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

It's an extraordinary story, particularly as it happened in an area of dense settlement and concentration of wealth. This enormous growth was in part made possible by its distinctive Roman social organisation.

Through struggle the general mass of Roman citizens—the plebeians—stopped the aristocracy from using their control of the state to exclude any kind of democracy.

Had they won, the aristocrats could have used their political dominance to control the peasantry on the land, which was



In the 400s, the Huns entered Europe from the Russian steppes, and got as far as Chalons, near Paris. They spread terror everywhere they went. Their empire collapsed in 476, but not before they set dozens of German tribes in motion towards the Roman Empire.



what happened in many other contemporary societies.

The plebeians' struggle ensured that the free citizen peasantry had a considerable measure of control over its own security.

They were also represented collectively to some degree in the Roman political system by the tribune of the plebs and so on.

After this the Roman aristocracy had to look outwards to competition with rival states to gain wealth.

And when it moved against other powers it found that it had a relatively willing citizen militia prepared to fight in the legions.

The legionaries identified materially with the empire and took a share of the booty.

WHY THEN did the empire decline?

The empire was a completely predatory system that could only carry on as long as there was territory it could absorb.

The Roman frontiers came to rest on the edges of the wilderness—mountains, deserts, uncleared forest and marshland.

Imperial resources drained away as they tried to conquer these areas. They got bogged down in guerrilla wars for very little return.

In the east they came up against the Parthian and later the Sassanid empires, strongly placed in modern Iraq and Iran. In a centuries long confrontation neither Rome nor its rivals

were able to achieve a decisive victory.

So Rome stopped expanding. The plunder stopped flowing in.

At the same time there were still long frontiers making heavy military demands and a large rich, urban based ruling class with its various client groups.

To maintain all of that it became necessary to ratchet up exploitation in the countryside within the empire by taxing the peasantry.

Each rise in taxes made another part of the traditional agricultural economy cease to be viable. Each ruined peasant farm further reduced the tax base—so taxes had to be raised again.

Once the system stopped expanding it quickly got into a negative spiral, eating away at its own ability to generate the wealth to maintain the empire.

In the West you had an urban based civilisation that to a large degree had been constructed by the Romans.

It also had several exceptionally long frontiers that had to be defended, principally in North Africa and the Rhine-Danube line in continental Europe.

That contrasts with the situation in the East where there was a very well established urban civilisation that the Romans took over, so the whole thing has much deeper roots.

The Western empire only generated a third of the tax revenue against the East's two thirds, whereas the West required about two thirds of the

military manpower to defend its frontiers.

The outcome was predictable. As these pressures split the vast empire in two, the West went to the dogs and the East was able to maintain itself.

WAS ROME genuinely more important than other ancient empires in that part of the world?

There are certainly other great civilisations that have been less studied.

The supreme example is Arab and Islamic culture. From the eighth century until the late medieval period the Arab world was well ahead in terms of economic progress, productivity, innovation on the land, irrigation schemes, the development of universities and learning and so on.

But there is a bias in the way Western political elites have looked to Greece and Rome for models of power, civilisation and culture.

Having said that, what happened in the fifth century BC in Greece, principally in Athens, was one of the greatest revolutions in the whole development of human culture.

Things changed incredibly fast. In the space of a few decades art, learning, philosophy and science were revolutionised.

There was a revolution in Athens. It became a democracy and for the best part of 150 years ordinary working people were involved in running the state.

Everything that happened

after that, including the Roman Empire, was culturally derivative of that great explosion. Roman art is essentially the art of fifth century BC Athens. It doesn't change much.

There was a great leap culturally in Greece which was bound up with revolution and democratisation.

The Roman Empire adopted the culture then put it in the service of a ruthless system of military imperialism.

The productivity of labour on the land was not significantly different by the end of the Roman period from the beginning. There were improvements, but they were quite limited.

The way in which rulers and the states they control competed to accumulate more surplus was principally through war—the physical seizure of land, slaves and booty that had been accumulated by others.

Roman plebeians were relatively privileged compared to non-citizens. But more importantly they were more privileged than the peasant populations of those states that were conquered.

There was no universal class like the working class, so there was no possibility of Roman citizens breaking with their rulers in alliance with non-citizen peasants elsewhere—let alone with the slaves accumulated through successful warfare.

There is no example of such unity in the whole of Roman history, and that shows us how fundamentally different it is from the capitalist world, where workers have an interest in building links across national and religious boundaries.

YOU RECORD various revolts against the empire, most famously the slave rebellion of Spartacus. Yet none succeeded. Was it ever really possible to challenge the brutality of the empire?

I'm with the great archaeologist of the ancient world Gordon Childe.

He said that the advances that matter—those that increase the productivity of labour and the capacity of human beings to improve their lives—are rooted in the productive classes and maintained by working people.

Real progress in history is always linked with the productive classes.

The degree to which these people fight back and claw back a greater portion of the productive surplus from the ruling classes, who are wasting it on war and luxury, is the degree to which humanity moves forwards.

Neil Faulkner is an archaeologist and a historian based at Bristol University. His new book, *Rome—Empire of the Eagles* is available from Bookmarks, the socialist bookshop—www.bookmarks.uk.com

The other Upton Sinclair



Upton Sinclair making a radio broadcast

By PAUL O'BRIEN

THE FILM *There Will Be Blood* was loosely based on the novel *Oil!* by Upton Sinclair, which he published in 1927.

Oil! tells the story of Bunny Ross, the son of a rich oil magnate and his friend, Paul Watkins, the son of a poor goat breeder.

Bunny becomes a "red millionaire" and Paul a strike leader. Bunny's sympathetic feelings towards oilfield workers and socialists provoke arguments with his father throughout the story.

The book was written in the context of the oil grab scandal in Southern California during the Harding administration.

Hopefully the film will revive interest in the writings of Upton Sinclair and especially his magnificent book *The Jungle*. Upton Sinclair was born in 1878.

He grew up in poverty and started to write at the age of fifteen. He was a prolific writer producing over a hundred novels and countless stories, essays and plays.

Much of this was hackwork in order to pay the rent. At one stage he was producing one poorly paid novelette a week. By 1904 Sinclair was moving towards realistic fiction and socialist politics.

He read the socialist classics and became a regular reader of the *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist weekly.

His decision to join the Socialist Party of America was based on his experience of a rapacious capitalism that is reflected in the film *There Will Be Blood!*

His politics hampered his literary reputation. In order to discredit him, the establishment frequently depicted him as a violent revolutionary.

Upton Sinclair stated in 1903 that "my cause is the cause of a man who has never yet been defeated" and he thought he left the Socialist Party in 1934 he remained a socialist until his death in 1968.

In his autobiography published in 1962 he wrote: "I believed what I have believed ever since I discovered the socialist movement at the beginning of this century".

He was also a board member of the American Civil Liberties Union. In 1934 Sinclair ran for the governor of California. He terrified the ruling-class to the extent that the conservative *Los Angeles Times* launched a campaign in which Sinclair was depicted as a supporter of free love and the nationalization of children.

Despite this he got nearly 900,000 votes, though he failed to get elected.

Sinclair is best known for *The Jungle* (1906). This book changed attitudes about the commercial production of food, though Sinclair always hoped that it would change the consciousness of workers.

It caused such an outcry that the government launched an investigation of the meatpacking plants of Chicago, and changed the food laws of America.

The book won Sinclair fame and fortune, and led to the implementation of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906. It had the greatest social impact on American soci-

ety since Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

As a result of his book President Theodore Roosevelt received one hundred letters a day demanding reforms in the meat industry.

The Jungle tells the story of Jurgis Rudkus, a young Lithuanian immigrant. He arrives in America dreaming of wealth, freedom, and opportunity. He eventually finds work in the Chicago stockyards.

He is grateful for the job and is astonished that his fellow-workers hate the way they are exploited and ground down. Gradually Jurgis' optimistic view of the "American dream" is destroyed in the chaos of work in the meat factories.

He loses both his wife, who has been raped by a foreman, and their child. In despair he revolts against the "American dream" that has destroyed his life. He becomes an outcast and a criminal.

His spirit all but crushed by privation and misery, finds redemption when he wanders into a socialist political rally, in which an orator delivers a speech that fills him with inspiration. Jurgis joins the socialist party and embraces its ideals. He finds a job as a porter at a socialist-run hotel and is reunited with his wife.

He attends a socialist rally in which the speaker sums up Jurgis's new beliefs: "if we win more people to socialism, the speaker declares, then 'Chicago will be ours!'".

The proceeds of the book enabled Sinclair to establish and support a communal retreat for socialist and progressive writers and artists.

However, a year later, the commune was burnt down, most likely by right-wing bigots. *The Jungle* was followed by a series of books that explored the nature of capitalist society. In *King Coal* (1917), a story about Colorado miner's strike of 1914, a rich young man, Hal Warner, becomes an advocate of trade unions.

Boston (1928) was about the Sacco/Vanzetti case, when two immigrant anarchist workers were executed on trumped-up charges that caused outrage in the 1920s.

The Lanny Budd series, consisting of four million words, in eleven contemporary historical novels enjoyed some popularity in the 1940s.

Its hero, the illegitimate son of a munitions tycoon, always manages to find himself in the middle of decisive moments in history.

He travels the world, meets such figures as Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler, Herman Göring, and Franklin Roosevelt, and is involved in international political intrigues. The last book in the series *The Return of Lanny Budd* (1953) deals with the post-war red scare and the hostility of the American government to the Soviet Union.

Much of Upton Sinclair's writing is dated; the Lanny Budd series hardly bears reading today. *Oil!* is worth reading if only to balance the individualism and religious undertones of the film, rather than the collective and socialist ideas that Sinclair wrote about.

The Jungle is a modern classic that deserves to be on every socialist and trade unionists bookshelf.

Progressive Film Club opens in Dublin

THE PROGRESSIVE Film Club is a voluntary organisation that has been established to show films that highlight the struggle for people's rights, for the rights of workers, of immigrants, and of women. Adrian Dunbar, the film actor and writer, officially launched the film club in early March.

At present he is directing Connolly, a film about the labour organiser James Connolly who was executed for his part in the 1916 rising. Most of these films have never been shown before in Ireland due to the domination of the Hollywood studio distribution system in the commercial cinema.

A film club such as this should exist in every city and town in Ireland. If such a circuit was established then it would be possible to obtain and distribute films and documentaries that for financial and artistic reasons never reach our shores.

If any groups are interested in this concept contact Progressive Films at their website: www.progressivefilmclub.ie Film Shows are on Sunday evenings at the New Theatre in East Essex Street. Tickets can be booked at Connolly Books in Essex Street. Socialist Worker will in future carry details of the programme.

Sunday 9 March 2008, 7:30 p.m.
I Saw Ben Barka Get Killed (2004)



Written and directed by Serge Le Péron.

A dramatised account of a notorious political scandal. The Moroccan intellectual and national liberation leader Mehdi Ben Barka disappeared in 1965 after being picked up by the French police in Paris.

The official account was that nothing was known about the incident; but the involvement of the criminal world together with the French police tells a different story. In French with English subtitles.

Sunday 16 March 2008, 7:30 p.m.
Fast Food Nation (2006)



Written and directed by Richard Linklater.

A drama loosely based on the book by Eric Schlosser.

A researcher goes to the slaughterhouse that supplies the meat for America's best-selling hamburgers.

There he discovers that the industrial production of food involves not only contamination but the exploitation of illegal immigrants as well as other abuses.

Sunday 15 June 2008, 7:30 p.m.
Days of Glory (2006)



Directed by Rachid Bouchareb.

A drama about the plight of North African soldiers who fought for France in the Second World War.

It follows a company of Algerian soldiers who fight against fascist Germany in Morocco and Italy and then in France, where their sacrifices for the "Motherland" are rewarded with discrimination. In French, with English subtitles.

NO to two-tier medicine

DEMAND A WORLD CLASS PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

The government is running down public hospitals and starving them of adequate resources to push people into using private hospitals.

Mary Harney and the FF-PD-Green coalition are pursuing policies that are ultimately going to remodel the Irish health service along the lines of the US one, where patients come second and profits

come first. At the moment there are cutbacks being implemented across all sectors of our health service.

Following an initiative launched by the Dublin Council of Trade Unions, a meeting of several hundred people has called a national demonstration for Saturday March 29th. This will be a great opportunity to unite all

the different campaigns and to mobilise all those who are worried about the state of our health service.

The campaign, which is led by the trade union movement, includes amongst its supporters the husband of the late Susie Long who highlighted the horror of what it means to be a public patient in Ireland today.

Some facts about our Health Services

- In 1980 there were 5.1 beds per 1000 population, today that has fallen to 2.9 beds. The number of beds has actually fallen while the population has increased and during a boom.
- Instead of investing in expanding our public hospitals and providing more beds, this government is proceeding with its co-location programme, which means that private hospitals will be built across the country on public land. The clear message to Irish patients is if you want decent health care you better make sure you can pay for it yourself through private health insurance
- A recruitment ban (or as the HSE calls it an Employment Control Framework) is currently in place across our health services. It means that even critical front line staff are not being recruited at the moment. These cuts in staffing are so bad that nurses who went on career break, instead of returning straight to their old job, now have to wait for a job to become available before they return to work
- Hospitals that are unable to stay within their inadequate budgets are being punished by the Health Services Executive. This punishment takes the form of refusing hospitals with budget overruns from access to any further funding. Hospitals who stay within budget are rewarded with more funding.
- Despite the funding crisis the chief executive of the HSE Professor Brendan Drumm received an €80,000 bonus on top of his €320,000 salary. In 2006 in addition to €1.24 million in bonuses to HSE staff, €7.96 million was spent on consultancy services

JOIN THE PROTEST...

Dublin Council of Trade Unions
Youth Committee ICTU

Campaign for a Decent Public Health Service

Rally & March

Saturday, 29th March 2008
Assemble Parnell Square,
Dublin at 3pm

ENOUGH!
A DECENT PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE NOW!

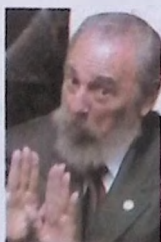
Speakers from Trade Unions, Health Professionals, Patient Groups and Health & Hospital Campaigns
Contact: 087 6229686; dctuhealth@gmail.com



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