

Socialist Worker

€1.00/£0.70

No. 291 : 8TH-21TH NOVEMBER 2008

WWW.SWP.IE

Stop the cuts Sack the government



Photo: Paula Geraghty

ANEW movement has swept Ireland, a protest movement against the budget that attacks workers living standards in order to bail out the bankers and the rich.

Three magnificent demonstrations of pensioners, students and teachers, with nearly 40,000 people marching, have rocked the government. Fianna Fail is at its lowest support ever at only 26%.

Lenihan has made it clear that he intends to make more cutbacks. At the same time he wants to raid the National Pension Fund and hand the money over to the banks because they are broke after a frenzy of speculation in the property boom. They made massive loans to developers who now can't repay their debts.

Why should we bail them out when the money could be better spent on real needs like our crumbling primary schools?

Rather than the government trying to boost the share value of the banks they should punish these speculators. Any public money used should get the best deal for taxpayers – not to cushion the rich. Already much of the money the US gave to their banks has been used to pay huge bonuses to top bankers.

The government should get the same deal as millionaire financiers like George Soros. When he buys a company he doesn't give away his money to soothe the greedy bosses, he gets the best deal possible. The heads of the Irish banks have shown themselves to be greedy and incompetent. We should nationalise the banks and let the millionaire bankers and property developers take the hit for the bad debts. They can well afford it giving the money they made in the boom.

The mortgages of people who are in danger of foreclosing should then be renegotiated to lower rates of interest so people can keep their homes.

The unsold houses and apartments of developers, as well as any land they have, should be taken off them to pay for their debts and used to house people on the housing waiting lists. We need to protect the standard of living of workers not the profits of banks and developers.

We need to take the profit motive out of the economy – it was greed and profit seeking that created the mess we're in.

But instead of doing this Brian Lenihan and Fianna Fail want to bail out their rich banker and the property developer friends. To pay for their crisis they are cutting back on essential services like healthcare and education for us.

Their system creates recession, hunger and climate chaos, but they want you to pay.

Until a few weeks ago, supporters of free market capitalism were confident enough to say that their system was the only way that the world could be organised. Now their certainties have vanished.

The economic crisis that started in banking and finance has spread quickly to the wider economy. Despite the billions spent on bank bailouts, thousands have lost their jobs.

We are told that these shutdowns are inevitable and that it is pointless to resist. Bosses claim there is simply a lack of a demand for the goods that are produced.

But while goods pile up unsold and workers are laid off, millions of people go without the things they need because they can't afford to buy them.

And the skills and machinery in each closing factory could offer solutions to some of the greatest problems facing humanity. For example, building workers could be employed to tackle climate change through a national drive to insulate homes.

We have the resources to build a better world. But the stranglehold of capitalism is the barrier. Now is the time to break their hold of the wealth and put it under democratic control.

Attacking deprived communities

OVER ONE hundred people attended a public meeting in Neilstown about the closure of the Collinstown sports and leisure centre.

The centre is just one of four similar facilities to close in south Dublin.

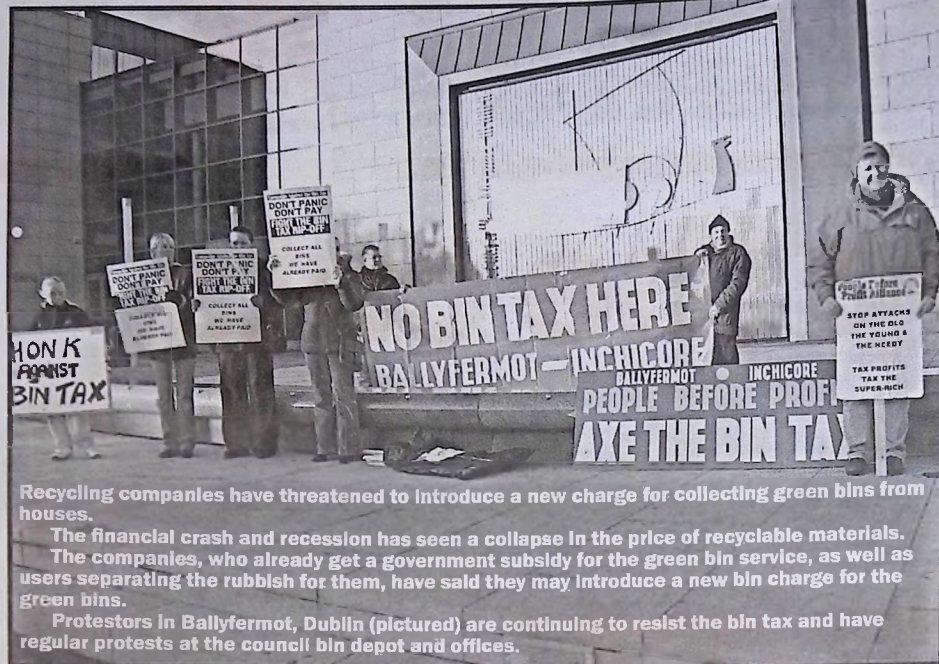
The other centres are in Tallaght and Palmerstown.

The centres are due to close down just before Christmas from lack of funding.

Speaking after the meeting, local activist Gino Kenny said, "It's absolutely unbelievable that centres like this can even think of closing."

In 1984, I was one of the first students to go to Collinstown college.

Back then, there was no gym for the students. It took almost 20 years to get



Recycling companies have threatened to introduce a new charge for collecting green bins from houses. The financial crash and recession has seen a collapse in the price of recyclable materials. The companies, who already get a government subsidy for the green bin service, as well as users separating the rubbish for them, have said they may introduce a new bin charge for the green bins. Protestors in Ballyfermot, Dublin (pictured) are continuing to resist the bin tax and have regular protests at the council bin depot and offices.

this facility, and now they want to close it down.

This is just the start

of the cutbacks which will effect areas like North Clondalkin"

The centres are

partly funded by the VEC and the HSE.

The people of Neilstown will be

marching against the local Fianna Fail TD John Curran to protest against the closures.

Anti-mast campaigns growing in support

By GINO KENNY

MASTACTION Clondalkin held a protest outside the Ronanstown Garda station last week.

The action was called in relation to the phone mast which is situated on the grounds of the station.

The Residents handed in a letter of protest, demanding that the Gardai meet with the local group.

Spokesperson

for the campaign Imelda Russell said, "It's been a year and a half since this campaign started."

"We are as strong as ever in getting the investigation into the effects of phone masts and electrical pylons which situated near our homes."

"We are hoping by doing this protest, that we are letting the government know, we haven't gone away."

Mast action in Basin Street



People Before Profit organised a public meeting to support residents in Basin St, Dublin 8, in their fight against a proposal to build a mobile mast.

The proposed site is adjacent to three schools, a hospital and a densely populated residential area.

An appeal against the mast was made to An Bord Pleanála and a protest was held outside FF TD Michael Mulcahy's clinic on Monday 27 October. A further protest is planned for Saturday the 15th of November.

Residents are angry that the interests of Private Developers may be put ahead of the public's health and safety.



Throughout Ireland people have been protesting at FF TDs offices and clinics. In Artane, Dublin some 50 people protested at FF TD Sean Haughey's clinic over the attacks on working class people. Protesters were joined by pensioners, teachers and parents.

A spokesperson for People Before Profit Dublin Central, Mr Colm Stephens, said, "All those who are outraged by the budget should let their local Fianna Fail TDs know how they feel."

Some are saying that if Bertie Aherne was leading the country these cuts would not have happened. But he voted with the government to cut class sizes and eliminate the free book scheme. He also voted to remove medical cards from pensioners. It's time he got the message that this is unacceptable". Pictured is a local protest against Frank Fahy FF TD in Galway.

Students in Belfast say "We won't pay for the Recession"

By MATT COLLINS

THREE student protests took place the last number of weeks in Belfast to build the fight-back in light of the economic crises.

On Thursday 16th October around 30 people including students and local community activists demonstrated outside the Ulster bank to demand that ordinary people shouldn't have to pay for the current banking crises.

Speakers on the protest highlighted the fact that while Gordon Brown has

billions to hand over to the banks students face increased debt and rising costs of living.

Activists then made their way down to the Europa bus centre to support a protest organised by Jordanstown Students Union against the rising cost of transport to the university. Students union activists demanded a free bus service for all students.

These protests were followed by a picket outside Tesco's the next week on Thursday 23rd October, here



students criticised the rising prices in Tesco's stating that in the last year

Tesco's have hit record profits while prices have skyrocketed.

Belfast anti-war movement protest at Royal Irish Regiment homecoming

By EAMONN McCANN

WE SHOULDN'T be welcoming the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) home.

We should be welcoming ALL the troops home.

They had no right to be in Iraq and Afghanistan in the first place. Far from bringing democracy, they brought only misery and death.

We reject Unionist attempts to make support for war a badge for the Protestant community.

No working-class person has an interest in backing the oligarchs and oil barons behind the push for war.

These are the same people who suck profit from the poor all over the world--including in Northern Ireland.

We reject the Nationalist opportunism of Sinn Fein, who bow down to George W. Bush--and then, when it suits them, pretend to be against Bush's wars.

There is global opposition to the Iraq and Afghan occupations. But, typically, Sinn Fein reduces this to Orange versus Green.

Ramping up sectarian tension helps both Unionists and Nationalists to deflect attention from the farce at Stormont, where they squabble over irrelevancies while the plain people bear the brunt of the capitalist recession.

The SWP and its sister organisations are involved in building the anti-war movement in the US, Britain, Ireland North and South, across Europe, every place we have a presence.

Oppressed people everywhere should stand against the bloody propaganda of pro-war politicians.

We should be in solidarity with those who march against war and militarism--not with the White House war-mongers and their ilk.

Only in this perspective is it possible to oppose imperialist wars by US and UK forces in a way which isn't divisive.

We should be shoulder-to-shoulder with everyone who defends the public sector, who fights against the free market which is ripping through every aspect of our lives, who organises to confront the capitalist system that fuels war for profit.

Ecuador constitution reveals in Latin



A demonstration last year in Lago Agrio in environmental trial against the oil major.

by MIKE GONZALEZ

ON 28 September, more than 60 per cent of Ecuador's population voted to support a new radical "Bolivarian" constitution.

It came at a key moment, as Bolivia's government continues to be besieged by the right wing alliance in the wealthy provinces of the east.

The new constitution, drafted by a Constitutional Assembly elected over a year ago, has 444 clauses. Many of its provisions represent major steps forward - the recognition of the "plurinational" character of the country, for example, or the environmental protections that it contains against the use of GM crops.

Crucially, it promises to close down the US base at Manta. There are provisions to limit the involvement of foreign corporations in the mass media of the country. Some private media enterprises such as Telemazonas actively supported the campaign to reject the new constitution.

Ecuador's important oil and gas reserves will be administered by a nationalised company. And social provisions include a woman's right to choose - which led the

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

WHA
Gre
der
AG
WA
Wa
cap
imp
doi
is a
con
mil
dor
ENI
OPP
We
opp
divi

Aer Lingus: Irish Ferries style battle looms

By KIERAN ALLEN

'THEY WANT to minimise the pay packets of workers and maximise their profits'. This is how one SIPTU activist described the current plans of Aer Lingus to outsource 1,500 jobs.

The company wants to get rid of staff in baggage handling, catering, cleaning and check-in. 'It is just about everyone who is not involved in flying' one worker explained.

It makes little sense from a logistical perspective. If Aer Lingus's baggage handling was outsourced, for example, passengers would have to wait in a queue until they could recover their luggage. 'If you have five planes landing, the contractors would handle the first planes that land. Aer Lingus passengers would just have to wait their turn'.

The plan, which was drawn up by the CEO Dermot Mannion, has little to do with providing a quality service. Its sole purpose is to maximise profit and dividends. Mannion is on a salary package of €1.1 million and clearly wants to gain even more by slashing jobs. He has no concern for the lives he will ruin by sacking hundreds of workers during one worst recession to face the country.

Mannion recently lectured workers about company losses.

'At the time, he said that oil was selling for €115 a barrel and the airline was in crisis. It could only break even if the oil price was set at €95 a barrel.

'But then there was a sud-

den slump in oil prices, and they have fallen to nearly €60 a barrel. Aer Lingus is now set to make a profit this year, maybe over €20 million. So why does he still argue for outsourcing?

As the dispute about outsourcing grew, Aer Lingus agreed to go the Labour Relations Commission.

They did not make the slightest effort to engage with the union. SIPTU tried to talk about other ways of cutting costs, such as increasing productivity. But they were not interested. They only wanted outsourcing'.

As the crisis grew, over 800 workers gathered to discuss their strategy. The meeting began with strenuous attacks on the SIPTU union leaders, with many activists pointing out that a few months previously they had allowed groups like the check-in operators to be bullied into accepting a company plan to worsen their conditions.

But by the end of the meeting, the union leaders came up with a plan of action.

They agreed to conduct a ballot on three options - which were not seen as exclusive to one another.

One was for all out industrial action; another was for more limited industrial action and a third was to invoke legislation passed after the Irish Ferries dispute.

As Socialist Worker went to press, there appeared to be overwhelming support for taking industrial action and also invoking the Irish Ferries legislation.



Aer Lingus: Facing outsourcing threat

Make sure SIPTU fights

OVER THE next few weeks, workers at Aer Lingus will be presented with an intimidating letter. They will be asked to either accept voluntary redundancy or agree to transfer to an outsourcing company.

Management are hoping that workers will start responding individually and help them to create the facts on the ground.

SIPTU will need to hold emergency meetings to rally

its members and ensure that this does not happen.

But deeper issues will also soon emerge if its main strategy is to invoke the Protection of Employment (Exceptional Collective Redundancies) Act.

The act allows for the establishment of a special panel to decide if there is genuine redundancy situation or whether the real aim is to cut wages. If a prima facie case is established, the

matter will be referred to the Labour Court to adjudicate.

If workers are dismissed during their period, they can seek compensation for unfair dismissal and the company can also be denied a state subsidy for its redundancy payments.

Unions clearly have to use every means at their disposal. But, unfortunately, SIPTU has established a tradition of looking for legal solutions when a mobilising

for battle. The Protection of Employment (Exceptional Collective Redundancies) does not secure workers their jobs.

What is really needed at Aer Lingus is immediate action to show Mannion that he will face an Irish Ferries style mobilisation from Irish workers.

'If we go down on this one, every other employer, will do the same as Aer Lingus. We have no choice but to fight'

A scare for the rightwing We won our bus back



Safe Hallowe'en in Rialto

By ROISIN RYDER

HALLOWEEN NEED not be a nightmare for communities if proper resources and imagination are invested in young people.

While tales of mayhem in areas of Dublin dominated the airwaves the night after halloween, in Rialto a fantastic spectacle/parade called The Night of the Dark Angel was organised by Fatima Groups United in conjunction with Macnas and Dolphin House Development Association.

With over 450 local participants - of all ages from Rialto, there were locally trained fire

eaters, stilt walkers, musicians and chanters.

The event weaved its way in and out of Rialto streets and managed to engage young and old.

Preparations for this event began 6 months ago with intensive involvement and training of local people in a range of street spectacle skills.

Young people especially were involved in all forms of art workshops to prepare for the night and it was great to see the end result at Halloween.

Instead of seeing young people as a problem they should be engaged in activities which they enjoy.

By HUGH LEWIS

AFTER 20 months of active campaigning by the People Before Profit (PBP) Alliance, the people of Loughlinstown in Dun Laoghaire will finally have their evening bus service reinstated.

A recent ballot by drivers overturned their previous decision to pull their service out of the area after 7pm due to anti-social behavior.

This victory comes just in time, with winter upon us.

The withdrawal of the service led to a deep sense of isolation in the community, particularly for its older residents.

However the terrible neglect of the Loughlinstown area continues.

An educational programme for teenagers in the community centre is facing closure because



The No 7 bus returns to Loughlinstown

its funding has been axed.

PBP is now mounting a campaign to reverse this decision and

will once again be calling on the people of Loughlinstown to defend their community with people power.

Exxon breaks own profit record with \$14.8B 3rd quarter

EXXON MOBIL has posted another record-breaking quarterly profit.

The oil giant earned \$14.8 billion in the third quarter, the

most ever by a US corporation.

That's nearly 15 percent higher than the previous record Exxon set in the second quarter.

Meanwhile, Europe's biggest oil company, Royal Dutch Shell, also reported high third quarter earnings, rising 74 percent to \$10.9 billion.

Ireland's new protest r



A sto

SUDDENLY There are ma workers on th revolt in the ment to defen created.

In Italy an Ireland signs are refusing to crisis and are ing to show.

The bigge Italy, where : parents are b Silvio Berlus 100,000 tea billion from Across the ec high schools shut. In Rome daily, targetin the senate an festival. In the Centocelle th dents are bloc into the city.

A 100,000- was sparked b to break up a s

ROB THE PENSION FUNDS TO BAIL OUT THE BANKS
"SHAME SHAME"

Pictures of rec

THROUGHOUT OCTOBER Dublin reverberated with a resounding battle cry from over 40,000 people that were targeted by the spending cuts in Cowens 2008 budget. Pensioners, Students, Teachers, Parents and second students took to the streets of Dublin voicing their anger.

15,000 pensioners forced the government into a U-turn on medical cards.

The FF/Green government thought they had done enough to divide the movement but a mass demonstration defended the right to universal health cover for pensioners.

Craig, a student in NCAD explained why he was protesting, "Education in this country is in danger of becoming a privilege for only those who can afford it with the raising of registration fees and the plans of this government to re-introduce 3rd level fees. As students we must do everything we can to fight these plans".

John a student from UCD said,



"The threat of reintroduction of collage fees was met with outrage by students in UCD. A protest to bock Brian Lenihan from entering a talk in UCD achieved widespread support and made national headlines".

Craig continued, "Our education system should be one based on inclusion and universality, which was initially proposed when fees were abolished in the 90s".

"The minister for education Batt O'Keefe claims only those with parents earning in excess of 125,000 per annum will be charged with tuition fees.

"But this threshold will drop once it has been passed hitting more and more middle to lower income students".

"Grown adults should not be means tested on the earnings of their parents, who are under no obligation to fund their childrens education".

"Its actually the underfunding of primary and secondary development

that results in fewer people from working class backgrounds entering universities".

Craig said, "The message is simple we have to come together to mobilise and organise an political alternative for this country".

Socialists in the colleges are arguing for mass assemblies and occupations to stop the government plans for fees.

Niall, a teacher in Dublin said, "Teachers unions are planning a campaign of protests over the next month to force the government to back down on education cutbacks including increasing class sizes".

"There will be protests in Galway 8th November, Tullamore 15th November, Cork 22nd November, Letterkenny 29th November and Dublin 6th December.

"Every trade unionist, pensioner, student and parent should try to make their local protest and force this government out".

WHAT WE THINK:

Unite the mo

THE LAST month has seen a magnificent response by pensioners, students and teachers to the cutbacks in the budget. A similar movement of workers has erupted across Europe.

The FF/Green government has declared class war on Irish workers. They bail out the banks and their rich developer friends and then turn the screw on us.

They intend to go further and raid the pension funds to save the

banks. But even this it won't be enough to ste deep recession.

The government and the bosses want to cut wages and living standards to recover their profits.

Its a disgrace that the leaders of the unions have gone along with this fraud and backed a pay deal that will see a reduction in their member's living standards.

Not content with this the government then imposed a 1% levy on

Best movement

A storm of protest is sweeping Europe

SUDDENLY EUROPE is aflame. There are mass demonstrations of workers on the streets, students in revolt in the colleges and schools, and pensioners are joining a movement to defend the welfare state they created.

In Italy and Greece as well as Ireland signs that working people are refusing to pay for the economic crisis and are fighting back are starting to show.

The biggest protests were in Italy, where students, teachers and parents are battling prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's decision to slash 100,000 teaching jobs and axe 8 billion from the education budget. Across the country universities and high schools are occupied. Over 90 percent of the country's schools were shut. In Rome students demonstrate daily, targeting the finance ministry, the senate and even the Rome film festival. In the working class area of Centocelle thousands of school students are blockading the main roads into the city.

A 100,000-strong march in Milan was sparked by an attempt by police to break up a student sit-in at the city's



main railway station. Fifty thousand marched through Turin accompanied by the city theatre's orchestra.

In Milan students demonstrated outside the stock exchange shouting that they should not have to pay for the economic crisis.

In Florence students blocked rail lines, in Naples they blocked the city's main square and in Venice the causeway from the main island to the mainland.

The following day Berlusconi threatened to "intervene with the police forces to stop these things happening".

Despite the warning, the occupations and road blockades continued and 24 hours later Berlusconi was forced to backtrack, saying, "I have never said or thought that the police must enter the schools."

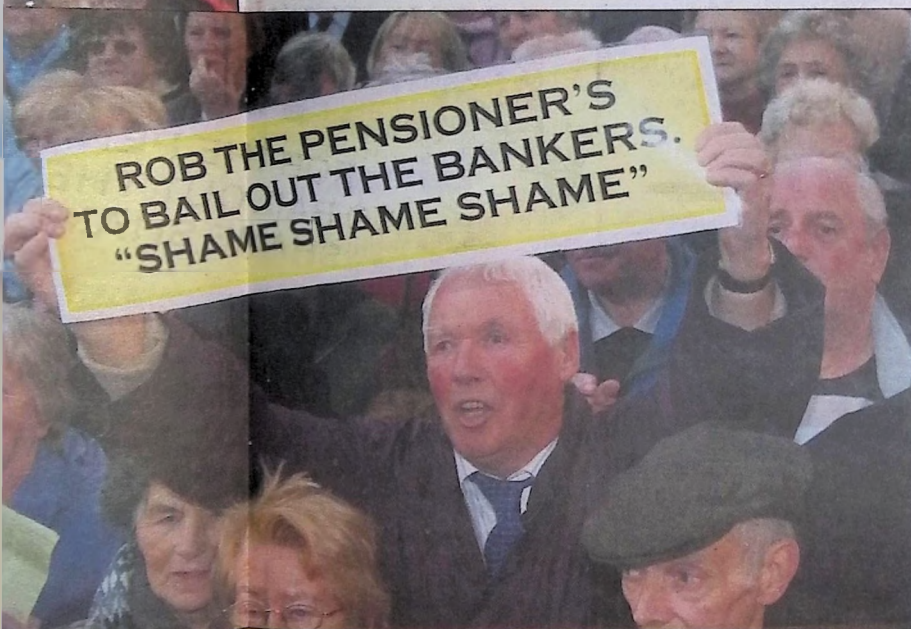
At the weekend the centre left Democrat party called a national protest that became a focus for everyone. Some two million people joined the march through Rome and there is now growing pressure for a general strike.

Meanwhile in Greece, workers and students took to the streets during last week's general strike chanting, "Make the capitalists pay for their crisis." The day before, railworkers occupied their company's head office in Athens against plans to break up the network and sack 2,000 workers.

In the northern city of Salonica 400 workers occupied the Siemens plant against closure while 2,000 textile workers facing redundancy clashed with riot police outside the economics ministry in Athens.

Next month it is expected that primary and secondary school teachers will join the battle with a 150,000-strong nationwide strike.

A mood of anger at the capitalist crisis is sweeping Europe. The radical left has an historic opportunity to shape the struggle and win a new generation to the battle for a society that rests on social justice.



Pictures of recent protests: Paula Geraghty

THINK: Unite the movements

3T month a magnificent by pensioners, and teachers backs in et. A similar of workers has across Europe. /Green ment has declared on Irish They bail out s and their rich friends and a the screw on ntend to go and raid the funds to save the

banks. But even this it won't be enough to stop a deep recession.

The government and the bosses want to cut wages and living standards to recover their profits.

It's a disgrace that the leaders of the unions have gone along with this fraud and backed a pay deal that will see a reduction in their member's living standards.

Not content with this the government then imposed a 1% levy on

gross pay.

The union leaders should learn from the pensioners about how to fight.

The teachers demonstrations in the run up to Christmas should be supported by every trade unionist. We need to see mass rallies against this government continue. Trade unionists, pensioners and students should come together to kick out this government.

The Labour Party has sensed the mood of anger in the country and want

to recover from their disastrous YES campaign in the Lisbon Treaty. They have been the most vocal party in the Dail over the financial crisis.

Any break to the left is to be welcomed, but Labour still supports privatisation of state companies like ESB and Dublin Bus. Their goal is to be part of a coalition government with FG, who are as intent as FF to attack workers. Sinn Fein also showed its colours by supporting the bank bailout.

We need to build a political alternative to the fake radicals of Labour, the Greens and Sinn Fein.

Socialists need to build and extend the protest movement wherever we can. The mass activity of workers will be key in defeating this government.

We need a strong People Before Profit Alliance and socialist movement to offer an alternative leadership in the struggles of the coming recession.

The workers of the world

THE GLOBAL working class has grown over the past decade, says a new report from the International Labour Organisation

Many mainstream commentators have simply written off the global working class as a dying force, eclipsed by a rising "middle class" in developed nations and by casualised workers in the Global South.

There are around one billion people across the world that are classified as part of the labour force by the ILO. This figure excludes people who make a living by working on their own land.

This global workforce was once concentrated in the Western nations, but today it is becoming ever more global. The richest economies account for just over 15 percent of total employment.

This share has declined over the past decade. In contrast the regions of Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean now account for nearly two thirds of world employment. Asia alone accounts for more than half.

Far from being a dying force, there has been a rapid growth in the size of the global working class. Capitalism has expanded over the last 30 years, leading to an increase in the number of workers as well as in the wealth that they produce.

But there has also been a shocking redistribution of that wealth to the ruling class – the tiny minority of corporate bosses, senior politicians and the super-rich that run the world and suck up the wealth that the rest of us generate.

Between the early 1990s and 2007 there was a 30 percent increase in global employment.

But the income gap between the rich and the poor grew ever wider. And the share of wealth created by workers that they actually receive is going down globally.

Wages as a share of GDP – the total wealth produced in any particular country – is a measure that tells us what proportion of wealth goes to those who create it.

In Latin America and the Caribbean it fell by 13 percent over the past 30 years. In Asia and the Pacific it dropped 10 percent and in the richest economies it dropped 9 percent.

Productivity

Workers are producing more – working harder and for longer hours – but their wages are not rising to match.

The ILO survey shows that in 24 of 32 countries surveyed between 1990 and 2006, productivity growth exceeded wage growth.

Between 1990 and 2000 more than two thirds of the 85 countries for which data is available experienced an increase in inequality.

During the same period, the income gap between the top and bottom 10 percent increased significantly in 70 percent of countries.

But there are other lessons to be drawn from the report.

Wherever you look in the world, workers do better if they are in a union.

Countries with a high "trade union density" – a large proportion of the workforce in unionised jobs – are those where the income distribution is less unequal.

Part time workers

Temporary employment is growing across the world, though not as fast as is often suggested.

The level of part time work in total employment since the mid-1990s has been broadly stable in the developed world, running at 16 percent in 2006.

Wherever you live, precarious jobs are less well paid than more secure jobs. In European countries, temporary jobs pay on average 20 percent less than their permanent equivalents.

The wages of casual workers in India constituted about 44 percent of the wages of salaried worker between 2004 and 2005 – as compared to 62 percent in 1983. Simply put, across the globe the drive to employ casual workers means that wages are driven down.

Tax breaks

The amount that the rich pay in tax has been cut across the world. The average corporate tax rate – in other words, the tax levied on profits – for the world as a whole decreased from 38 percent in 1993 to less than 27 percent in 2007.

Not a single country has increased its corporate tax rates since 2000.

When it comes to personal tax rates, the very rich have also done well. Their average tax rate was cut from 37 percent to 34 percent over the same period.

At the same time far higher proportion of government revenues have come from "indirect" taxes such as VAT. These hit workers harder, since workers spend a far higher proportion of their income on buying consumer goods.

Indirect taxes have increased across the world. VAT in Germany increased from 13 percent in 1980 to 19 percent in 2007. In Latin America the rate rose from 10 percent in 1980 to 15 percent in 2007.

Workers across the world are footing more of the bill for the public services – while the rich are paying less.

Bosses' pay

The pay of bosses across the world is at least 50 times higher than average wages and, in some cases, 180 times more – and that is excluding bonus payments.

The most unequal society in the developed world is the US, where the growing disparity is notably sharp between executives and the average worker.

Chief executives there earned 520 times the average worker in 2007, up from 360 times more in 2003.

Once you factor in bonuses, the average pay of US bosses rose from \$16 million per year in 2003 to \$24 million in 2007. This increase – nearly 10 percent per year on average – compares to a 0.7 percent increase in wages for US workers.

The statistics show that in terms of numbers the global working class is as strong as ever – and has every reason to fight back. It is workers struggle that will decide whether we will be able to reverse the looting of wealth by the bosses that has taken place in the past 30 years. And it is that struggle that will decide whether capitalism's current crisis will lead to the building of a socialist world, or with us all sinking ever further into barbarism.

The ILO report can be downloaded from www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inst/download/world08.pdf [1.4mb PDF]

Will Obama bring change?

GEORGE BUSH'S eight years as president – marked by nakedly imperialist military aggression abroad and callous arrogance on the home front are over.

The people of the US have voted for Barack Obama, and swept the Democrats to commanding positions in both houses of the Senate. This is an historic event. The US's first African-American president and a Democrat dominated Senate, last seen in the 1930s.

Only 50 years ago black people across the US were denied the vote and subjected to a system of apartheid-style laws.

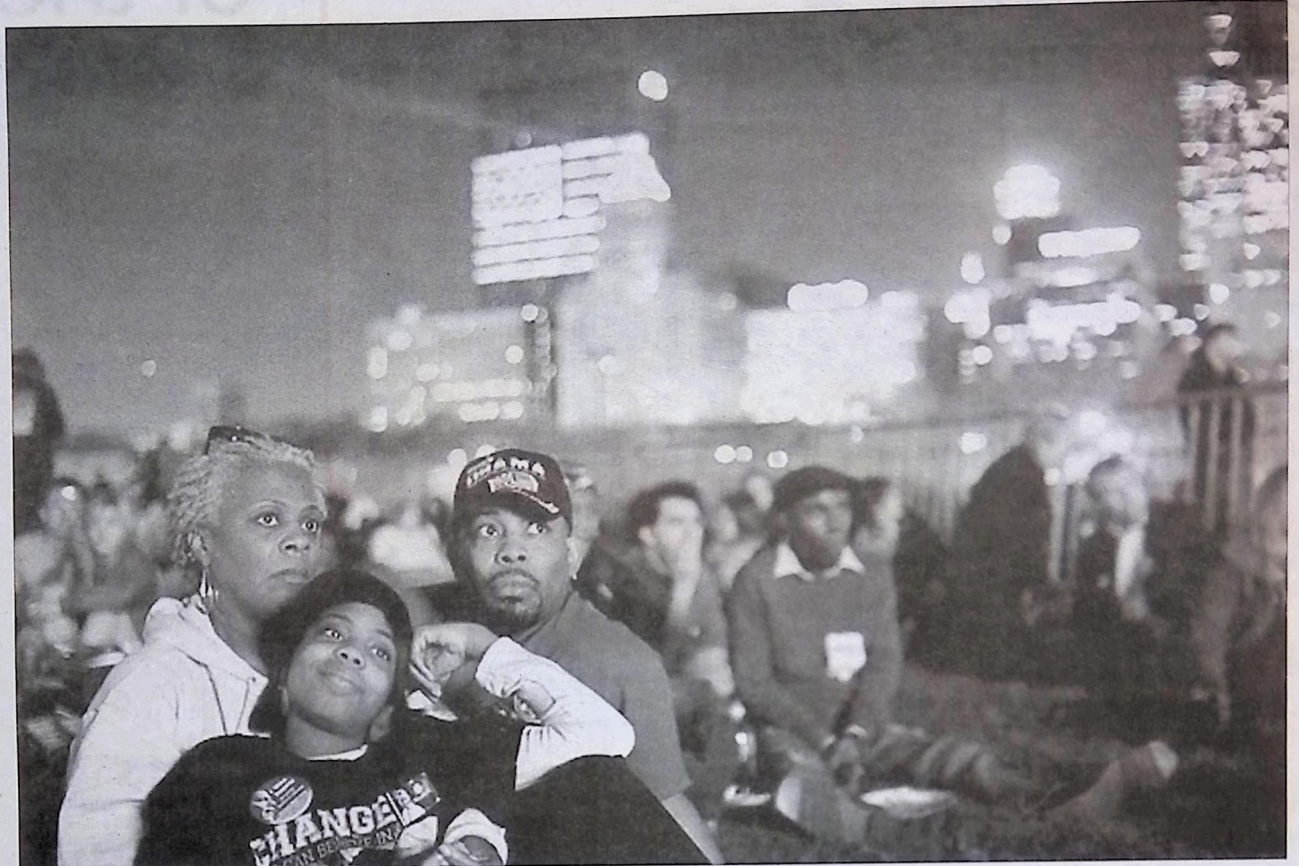
The notion that ordinary people in the US are irredeemably racist has suffered a major blow.

Obama's election campaign saw mass rallies of hundreds of thousands of people desperate for change. McCain's attempt at 'red baiting' didn't work as most Americans think the rich should pay more taxes. But will Obama deliver on people's hopes?

Obama has carefully positioned himself as the candidate of "change", knowing full well that rage at Bush's wars and despair at the state of the economy would be the primary factors driving people to the polls.

His campaign for the presidency gained from an early – and undeserved – association with the anti-war movement. Having won the Democratic nomination he tacked right calling for more troops to be sent to Afghanistan, refocusing on the 'war on terror' – he lost popularity in the process.

But events came to his rescue. The extraordinary collapse of leading Wall Street institutions in September wrongfooted McCain. Obama's response was to chime in with the Wall Street



Thousands celebrate Obama victory in Chicago; Below: The US President-elect and Vice President-elect



bankers bailout.

The US political elites have been hit by a wave of working class anger. Obama has been the beneficiary of this wave. Huge numbers of black, white and Hispanic voters have rallied behind him to demand an end to poverty, repossessions, joblessness and war.

But Obama has already sold out the anti-war movement and his backing for the \$700 billion bailout shows his support for US

capitalism.

His new cabinet looks set to include the worst elements of Bill Clinton's foul administration. All people who were up to their necks with Wall Street.

Will ordinary people respond to Obama's administration with increased confidence, militancy and independent action? Or will they be demoralised and depressed as the inevitable sell outs unfold?

This is the fundamental chal-

lenge for the anti-war left in the US. It needs to both shape and learn from the new mood in US politics. That means rejecting any illusions in the Democrats – but also rejecting the sectarian temptation to stand aside at this crucial moment.

Socialists understand that the real force for political change is the collective action of mass working class movements. The test for the left in coming months is to help build such a force.

Workers in struggle: the other America

THE ENORMOUS enthusiasm that surrounds Barack Obama's presidential election is an expression of the desire of millions to see change.

Only the most cynical person could fail to be inspired by the massive turnouts at his rallies and the idea that 40 years on from the civil rights movement the US could elect its first black president.

Underlying this surge in support for the Democrats are fundamental changes taking place in that section of the US rarely talked about – the working class.

Workers in the US are angry at low wages, poor working conditions and lack of health provision. This has led to struggles we rarely hear of in Ireland.

Last week 27,000 machinists working for Boeing – a major aerospace and defence corporation, won their seven week strike over pay, pensions and healthcare benefits.

In Florida unskilled, low paid, casual agricultural workers, mainly Latino, Haitian and Mayan Indian immigrants who travel along the east coast of the state following the harvest season set up the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) as a community-based workers' organisation.

The CIW has organised three



strikes of all of its members since 2005. They forced Taco Bell and McDonalds to recognise the union and won all its demands to improve wages and working conditions.

This is a hidden history rarely reported by the mainstream media in this country. And it puts paid to the lie that US workers won't fight and that they all buy into the "American Dream".

For the rich in the US the last 30 years have been very good. Since 1979 the income for the top 0.01 percent of the US population has quadrupled. But for the working class it has been a different story. The standard of living for the

average US worker is in decline. It is not uncommon for workers to hold down two, three or even four jobs to make ends meet.

The New York Times wrote recently, "Income for the median household – the one in the middle of the income distribution – will be lower than it was, amazingly enough, a full decade earlier. That hasn't happened since the 1930s."

"Already, median pay today is slightly lower than it was in 2000, and by 2010, could end up more than 5 percent lower than its old peak."

Today a quarter of US workers live on poverty wages and two

million will have their homes repossessed this year.

According to the Bureau of Labor statistics, unemployment has risen by 2.2 million in the last year and it looks set to rise to 10 percent.

When you look at the breakdown in more detail you see how racism and class have an impact on unemployment. The unemployment rate for white males stands at 5.4 percent, yet for black males it is 11.4 percent and for Hispanics 7.8 percent.

A record 28 million Americans are now relying on food stamps to survive.

Obama's main proposal to deal with the economic crisis is to offer companies a \$3,000 tax break for every new job they create, this year and next. He also proposes a 90-day ban on foreclosures for families "making a good-faith effort" to keep up with mortgage payments.

Obama's campaign has reinvigorated ideas of equality and justice for ordinary people. But many in the trade union movement are well aware that the election of Obama will not bring about the kind of policies that millions of US workers need and desire.

There are signs that the US trade union movement is going through a small but real revival. According to the Bureau of Labor statistics, union

membership rose by 311,000 to 15.7 million in 2007.

It would be a mistake to exaggerate this modest increase in union membership. Union levels are still lower than at any time since the 1920s.

But despite the devastation of working class communities there is a long tradition of resistance in the US, such as the massive strike waves of 1934-36, the 1960s and 1970s.

Yet these struggles were blunted as the union leaders repeatedly channelled them into support for the Democrats.

The Democrats are wedded to a system that makes workers fund the lifestyles and profits of the rich.

The economic crisis that is hitting the US right now is going to bring with it fear, anger and resistance.

The potential for rebuilding the unions, creating rank and file organisation, connecting the demands of union and non-union workers, black, white and Hispanic exist.

Support for Obama represents something deeper than the desire for a Democratic president.

Real change in the US will ultimately depend on the very people who have been so often written out of the history of America – the working class.

INTERNATIONAL

Ecuador's new constitution reveals tensions in Latin America



A demonstration last year in Lago Agrio in protest at Chevron's delaying tactics in the landmark class action environmental trial against the oil major.

Photo by Lou Demattois/Spectral Q

by MIKE GONZALEZ

ON 28 September, more than 60 per cent of Ecuador's population voted to support a new radical "Bolivarian" constitution.

It came at a key moment, as Bolivia's government continues to be besieged by the right wing alliance in the wealthy provinces of the east.

The new constitution, drafted by a Constitutional Assembly elected over a year ago, has 444 clauses. Many of its provisions represent major steps forward – the recognition of the "plurinational" character of the country, for example, or the environmental protections that it contains against the use of GM crops.

Crucially, it promises to close down the US base at Manta. There are provisions to limit the involvement of foreign corporations in the mass media of the country. Some private media enterprises such as Telem Amazonas actively supported the campaign to reject the new constitution.

Ecuador's important oil and gas reserves will be administered by a nationalised company. And social provisions include a woman's right to choose – which led the

Catholic church to mobilise against what it called this "abortionist" document.

Rafael Correa, Ecuador's president, argued that his proposal was part of a strategy for 21st century socialism, and compared it to the Venezuelan constitution of 1999. It fits with the continental strategies of integration around issues of energy and finance.

Correa, though, is a Harvard-trained economist. And while the new Constitution removes the word "market" from the definition of the economy – it is now a "social solidarity economy" – there are other clauses which leave things much more open.

There is provision, for example, for joint or mixed enterprises with foreign capital. There are serious ambiguities on the question of land reform. There are also a number of clauses limiting strikes in the public sector and imposing compulsory arbitration elsewhere.

None of this should take away from the overwhelming support for radical policies given by the Ecuadorians. How it is interpreted and implemented, however, will depend on whether the social forces exist to carry through the radical

possibilities that are embedded in the document.

Ecuador has offered inspiring examples of mass struggle in the last ten years. Three times – in 1999, 2000 and 2003 – attempts by national presidents to impose punishing neo-liberal programmes were defeated by mass movements.

These movements were doubly impressive because they brought together the national organisation of indigenous people and the national trade unions.

The so-called "autonomy" movement of the wealthy eastern regions in Bolivia is a sign of reactionary and imperialist strategies in the region. In Ecuador, the wealthy Guayaquil region produced a slim majority against the Constitution, and has now taken up the autonomy slogan.

Correa is hedging his bets. He has announced that he will not join the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA) alliance of Chavez and others for the moment.

Ecuador's constitution is not a guarantee – rather it can be an opportunity to rebuild and regenerate a movement for change that has already shown how powerful it can be.

Pay up for water or the old folks get it!

>>From Page 12

How much has been spent by NIW management on corporate events since the inception of the company?

How much are consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers (PCW) being paid for "advising" NIW? Will the Minister give an assurance that NIW won't be privatised?

The response came on September 29th in a document signed by Mr. Murphy's private secretary, Lynne McElhinney.

Here's the answer to the query on the use of outside contractors: "Use of contractors has been part of NIW and Water Service's activity for over 15 years. Over recent months there has been a significant rationalisation of the Company network of operations contractors to reduce cost, improve services to customers and compliance." Which isn't an answer at all.

Why were union warnings ignored when the £26 million "toughbook" project was introduced? "There have inevitably been a number of 'teething problems' associated with the roll-out of this technology, but NIW has expressed confidence that the feedback and improvement process will address these." Meaningless.

At least the answers to some of the other questions were clearer. Or rather, non-answers.

Why the different bases for setting managers' pay and "ordinary"

workers' pay? No answer.

How much is PWC costing the Department? Question ignored.

How much has been spent on corporate events? No answer.

Would the Minister give an assurance that NIW won't be privatised? Question ignored.

Of course, Conor Murphy won't have drafted these non-answers himself. And that's part of the problem. Under devolution, as under Direct Rule, public services are not being run by Ministers accountable to elected representatives who are in turn entitled to straight answers, but by business interests concerned only for profit, vastly overpaid "consultants" and the brigade of pin-stripes in the upper ranks of the civil service.

Earlier this year, the Independent Water Panel headed by Professor Paddy Hillyard rejected the idea of winding up NI Water and bringing the service back within the public sector: to do so "would cost our public expenditure budget over £90 million per year and increasing."

Sounds cheap at half the price. But the chances of the DUP-Sinn Féin alliance going down this road are nil. In practice, both parties have embraced neo-liberalism big time. And in neither case, has there been any grass-roots resistance...which some super-optimists might have expected from SF.

Abortion campaigners vow to fight on

by BARBARA MULDOON

PRO CHOICE campaigners in the north have vowed to continue the fight for abortion rights for women after a disgraceful manoeuvre from New Labour politicians prevented the matter even being discussed at Westminster.

Diane Abbott's proposed amendment to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill proposed extending the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, 41 years after women in England Scotland and Wales secured the right to free NHS abortions.

The night before the Bill came before Westminster Harriet Harman confirmed that she would use a "time-table motion" to keep the amendment from being debated or voted on.

Campaigners know that there was a last minute government panic that the amendment might actually get passed.

It is an open secret that Gordon Brown had promised the DUP that he would ensure that women in Northern Ireland would continue to be denied abortion rights in return for their support on 42 day detentions without trial contained in his Counter Terrorism Bill – thereby trading off one human rights abuse for another.

When Diane Abbott tabled the amendment all four political parties in the north signed a letter saying that they were opposed to the moves and that people in the north did not want to see the Act.

But a "Rally for Life" at Stormont showed how little support the anti-choice lobby has. Free buses ran from dozens of places around the entire country. Organisers claimed that Youth Defence would be turning out in huge numbers to attend the rally.

There was a massive publicity campaign with press advertisements and huge billboards everywhere. The event was also advertised in almost every church magazine.

The campaign had the tacit backing of all four main political parties and a number of very prominent politicians called publicly for people to attend the event. The media reported that the event had "hundreds in attendance".

Pro-choice campaigners believe that all of this pressure led to the 11th hour government intervention, desperately fearful that MPs might actually heed the pressure and vote to extend the Act.

Although campaigners were disappointed they were not surprised by the government dirty tricks.

The campaign helped shift pro-choice issues into the mainstream in Northern Ireland for the first time ever.

Alliance for Choice activists will be taking part in Equality Week in Queens University.

We will continue this fight until women in the north secure the right to free, safe and legal abortions on the NHS.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

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

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

REVOLUTION

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

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

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

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

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

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

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

working class.

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

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

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

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

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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

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

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

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

Join the Socialists

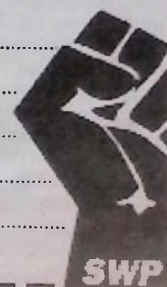
Fill in the form and send to
SWP PO Box 1648 Dublin 8

Name.....

Address.....

Email.....

Phone.....



Socialist Worker



Assembly dithers while economy collapses

Make the bosses pay for the recession

By GORDON HEWITT

IT WAS only just over six months ago that we were told the economic outlook for Northern Ireland was continued growth and solid job prospects.

It was as if Northern Ireland was a port in the economic storm.

Nigel Dodds highlighted the fact that growth was at 5.6% and we had net jobs growth. The Northern Ireland region was set to weather the storm (his stats were based on 2006 not 2008 figures).

It was also argued by some economic commentators, directly at odds with their previous criticisms of the Northern Irish economy, (too much state sector – not enough private sector – not enough aid for entrepreneurs or small business) that with the economy highly dependant on the state sector it would not suffer in the same way that economies like those of Ireland.

Being highly liberalised and privatised, Ireland would suffer and of course is now in recession.

Regardless of “growth” over the last few years, and the increases in jobs through the building boom or the arrival of the call centres – the economic



First Minister Peter Robinson

situation here is pretty dire.

The rate of poverty remains stubbornly high – close to 30 per cent of the population live on fixed incomes – an extraordinarily high percentage of the population experience poverty and around a third of children here grow up in families experiencing poverty.

Low unemployment figures are masked by higher than average levels of economic inactivity and a substantial number of people on disability benefits.

Prices for gas, electricity, heating oil, clothing and general household goods were already higher on average than prices in the UK. The economy here was pretty

recessed to start with.

Storm

The Northern Irish economy is not going to weather the storm.

There will be an impact from the recessions in Britain and Ireland.

The slowdown in the housing market and the building industry is having a big impact on job losses.

Sixty per cent of the increase in applications for the dole came from the building industry, sites are shifting to four and three day weeks.

There are likely to be job cuts in the public sector and the Assembly is still wedded to further liberalisation and the sell-off of the state sector.

On top of that electricity and gas prices are still rising as is the price of food and while there has been some reprieve on petrol prices and heating oil it is still far above affordable levels.

The Assembly needs to ditch neo-liberalism as the answer to our economic woes, but this will only happen when we start to fight against job cuts, price rises and wage restraint, just like workers in the South and across Europe are doing.

Pay up for water or the old folks get it!

By EAMONN McCANN

THAT'S THE message from the North's Department of Regional Development which has let it be known that it may not have the money to deliver free travel to the over-60s.

One of the reasons for the shortfall is, apparently, that deferring water charges until 2010 will cost the Department £420 million. So, unless the hated charges are brought in, a number of initiatives, including the expansion of free travel, will have to be abandoned.

A further suggestion from within the DRD is that the difficulties might be eased by slashing planned expenditure on the rail network—cancelling all weekend trains and journeys scheduled for after 10pm is one bright suggestion, no doubt from

a civil servant who hasn't been on a train for years.

In fact, the annual number of rail passengers in the North has increased from six million to 10 million over recent years. Many will find it hard to understand how cutting back on the service could help solve a problem of resources.

But then, management of resources at the DRD constitutes a mystery wrapped in an enigma designed by a consultant.

In November 2006, the Department defended having paid consultants £18 million for advice on water service “reform” on the basis that the “reforms” would “free up £300m by the end of the decade for health, education and transport.” Nobody at the DRD dares defend that statement now.

The extent of evasion within



Travelling first class: Minister Conor Murphy, while his Department threatens free travel expansion

the Department was clear in the response to a series of questions

posed to Minister Conor Murphy last July by unions representing water

workers.

The questions included: why are so many outside contractors being used on jobs which Northern Ireland Water (NIW) staff are more than capable of doing?

Why was no pilot study carried out before the introduction of a £26 million Mobile Work Management System which is not working—just as the unions had warned?

Why, in the current pay and grading review, are senior managers being bench-marked against cross-channel water companies, while industrial staff are being benchmarked against companies like supermarket group ASDA: particularly when ASDA does have senior managers, but has no equivalent of industrial workers?

>> Turn to page 7